DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 341 878 CG 022 743

AUTHOR Marged, Judith
TITLE An Alternative Education Program To Create Successful Learning for the Middle School Child At-Risk.
PUB DATE 90
NOTE 123p.; Ed.D. Practicum, Nova University.
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses - Practicum Papers (043) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC05 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Grade 7; Grade 8; *High Risk Students; Junior High Schools; *Middle Schools; Motivation; Parent Participation; Program Effectiveness; School Counseling; Self Esteem
IDENTIFIERS *Middle School Students

ABSTRACT

There are potentially successful students who are failing one or more subjects every year. Many students are spending more than the normal 3 years at the middle school level because of this failure. A program was designed to increase the self-esteem, motivation, and interest of at-risk students, thereby improving their grades. A second aim was to increase parents' involvement in their children's educational growth. Seventh and eighth grade students (N=10 to 18 and N=8 to 18), respectively, from a middle school located in the southeastern United States were observed and questionnaires were administered to them. After assessing their needs, contracts between teacher and student were prepared. Rewards were dispensed following fulfillment of the contracts. Students also received counseling, individual attention, tutoring and self-enhancement classes. Field trips and cooperative learning projects were additional components of the program. Students, teachers, and parents evaluated the effectiveness of the program. Even though not every student improved, the overall program was productive. Students attended school regularly, improved grades, and increased motivation and self-esteem. A positive environment and experience helped to promote learning in students at-risk of dropping out of school. The most successful component of the program was the counseling sessions and the contracts were also fairly successful. Parental involvement was judged the least successful component of the program. (Author/ABL)

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ED341878

An Alternative Education Program to Create Successful Learning for the Middle School Child At-Risk

by

Judith Marged

Cluster 30

A Practicum II Report presented to the ED.D Program in Early and Middle Childhood in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Nova University

1990

CG022743

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PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

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7/18/90
Date of Final Approval of Report

Polly Peterson
Polly Peterson, Ph.D., Advisor

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would graciously like to thank Dr. Polly Peterson for being my friend, advisor, and mentor throughout the practicum process. Her expertise helped me to accomplish a very difficult task with extreme ease and confidence.

I also would like to thank my colleagues. They changed plans at a moment's notice, implemented extra projects, listened to my complaints and frustrations, and did not complain or refuse to do anything asked of them.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents. They gave me the incentive to pursue my doctorate and the caring and understanding to continue through the rough moments.

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ABSTRACT

Alternative Education: A Program to Create Successful Learning for the Middle School Child At-Risk. Marged, Judith M., 1990: Practicum Report, Nova University, Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood. Descriptors: Middle School/ Grade 6, 7, 8/ Junior High/ Secondary School/ Potential Dropouts/ High Risk Students/ Self-esteem / Self-concept

This practicum was designed to provide a positive experience for at-risk students. The primary goal was to increase the self-esteem, motivation, and interest of students, thereby improving their grades. A second aim was to increase parental involvement in their child's educational growth.

The writer observed students and administered questionnaires to the them. After accessing their needs, contracts between teacher and student were prepared. Rewards were dispensed following fulfillment of the contracts. Students also received counseling, individual attention, tutoring, and self-esteem enhancement classes. Field trips and cooperative learning projects were additional components of the program. Students, teachers, and parents evaluated the productiveness of the program.

The outcome of the study was meaningful. Even though not every student improved, the overall program was productive. Students attended school regularly, improved grades, and increased motivation and self-esteem. A positive environment and experience helped to promote learning in students at-risk of dropping out of school.

The most successful component of the program was the counseling sessions. The contracts were also fairly successful. Parental involvement was the least successful compenent of the practicum.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Work Setting and Community

This practicum took place in a middle school located in the Southeastern United States. It is in a large, middle to upper class community and considered to be one of the top schools in the county.

The total student population at the time of the practicum was composed of the following: (1) 92.6% White; (2) 3.5% Hispanic; (3) 2.1% Black; and (4) 1.8% Asian. There were approximately 475 sixth graders, 474 seventh graders, and 506 eighth graders, for a total of 1,456 students.

This practicum involved 10-18 seventh graders and 8-18 eighth graders who had been identified as at-risk of being potential dropouts. The group consisted of the following ethnic makeup: (1) 75% White; (2) 16.7% Hispanic; (3) 0% Black; and (4) 8.3% Asian.

The staff at that time consisted of about 110 teachers, administrators, secretaries, and custodians. The learning took place within regular, special, alternative, and elective classes. The students started the day with a 15 minute homeroom, then had six 55-minute class periods. The stu-

dents are required to take four major subjects and two electives.

Writer's Work Setting and Role

As part of a two membered teaching team, the writer taught 7th and 8th grade, Alternative Math and Science, and a 6th grade Health class. The other member of the alternative team taught Language Arts and Social Studies. Both teachers had the students for a 2-hour block of time. The classes are small to allow for individualized learning. This was the third year that the writer was teaching the alternative classes.

Even though there had been some success with the alternative classes, the writer felt that more could be accomplished. The writer taught the required math and science curriculum to her students. As part of this practicum, she also added more innovative components so that the alternative program would become a thriving entity within the school which would reduce the potential dropout risk of these students.

The writer was made the Alternative Department Head and the At-Risk Coordinator for the school. Besides her regular teaching duties, the writer was also responsible for the dropout prevention program in the school. She was

expected to create a positive environment for the students to learn, be a contact person for the school for the at-risk students, promote parental involvement, and create a successful experience for her at-risk students.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

There are potentially successful students who are failing one or more subjects every year. Many students are spending more than the normal three years at the middle school level because of this failure. Some pupils begin to talk about dropping out of school. They cannot perceive how a high school diploma is going to make a difference. They think that at the age of 16 they are ready to face the world.

If a student fails once, he will more than likely fail again. The child becomes a part of a vicious cycle. When he fails, he thinks that he cannot succeed, so he does not try, and therefore fails again. The student needs to be exposed to a positive and successful experience. This might help to alleviate any thoughts of dropping out of school.

The writer's school, being in a prosperous neighborhood, did not seem inclined to be a school that had many at-risk students. However, even a school in an upper-middle class area was not exempt from this problem. The administration was attempting to eliminate, or at least reduce, the dropout risk from its student population.

There were many students, who, for a variety of reasons, were either dropping out of school or graduating with very limited skills. These students were capable of succeeding, but instead were failing and were at-risk of having an illiterate future. The problem addressed the need of competent students to be given every opportunity available in order to exclude them from becoming a part of the at-risk society.

Problem Documentation

In recent years the disenchantment with school has grown among the student population. In previous years the writer had several students who expressed their desire to leave school. One student, who was 15 years old, had already started the countdown until his 16th birthday. That would be the day when he would leave school for good. He claimed that he had learned nothing in school. He was an 8th grader at the time. The writer learned that he did drop out for a few weeks, but reentered school in compliance with a new state law. He would have lost his driver's license if he had remained out of school.

Many students were unmotivated to do schoolwork. Even the simplest of tasks seems to take forever to be completed. If such youths were allowed to draw, read their skateboard-

ing magazine, or talk about heavy metal rock groups the enthusiasm flowed. But as soon as math or science entered the conversation, the degree of interest dropped drastically. The writer watched one student take 20 minutes to do 10 simple mathematical problems, but only 5 minutes to create a skateboard exhibition routine.

Another observation made daily was the length of time it took to get from one class to the next. The students have four minutes to change classes. But for some, ten minutes were not enough time to go from room to room. They stood and conversed long after the tardy bell rang. They did not care if they were late to class because even when they did arrive, they accomplished little.

Some students expressed a boredom about school and classwork. The writer had been asked numerous times why the same thing was taught year after year. What was worse, they did not believe that any of what they learned would be used in the future. They refused to learn what they would not need.

Every year the administrators expressed their views and feelings about this forgotten segment of the student body. They were perplexed about why some students seem to get lost within the walls of the school. The teachers observed how several students per class sat, stared, and did very little work. They did not get involved with the rest of the class. The teachers were complaining about truancy, lack of motiva-

tion, and disinterest among several of their students. They also expressed their dismay at the lack of parental support by the parents of some of these students.

According to the guidance department, for the past several years, the list of students who were in danger of failing one or more subjects had increased. The number of students being retained and those attending summer school had also multiplied. Some parents have pulled their children out of school and opted for home study; the main reason stated by many of these parents was because of all the trouble their children were having at school. Many of the students were home anyway because of suspensions. By teaching them at home, the parents avoided frequent trips to the school. The parents applied for a home study certificate with the county and received the necessary materials. Whether the parents actually taught and the children really learned, is a question that can only be answered by the children's future schools or employers.

In addition to low report card grades, many of the students also had low achievement test scores. The writer observed, on numerous occasions, many students filling in answers, in no particular pattern, without even bothering to read the questions. They finished a 45-minute, timed test in 15 minutes or less. They then wondered why they only scored 4% on the exam.

As a display of how important it is to keep the at-risk students in school, the district provided extra funding for dropout prevention classes. This allowed the principal to keep the enrollment in each at-risk class at under 18 total students. The low number allowed for more individual attention and best met the needs of the students.

The dropout problem is not just a local one. According to the Carnegie Corporation Study (Washington Post, 1989) middle schools across the United States have received a failing grade. The study stated that children from age 10 to 15 were vulnerable and in jeopardy of becoming failures. These impressionable youth had high absenteeism, low grades, and were being forgotten within the education environment.

The Florida Education Commissioner (Associated Press, July 24,1989) thought that the curriculum needed a major overhaul. She stated that teacher training had to be improved to include training the teacher to help the at-risk student. It had been years since teacher education had changed, and now was the time for that change to occur.

In addition to training teachers, the students need to be motivated to stay in school. The Florida legislators were helping to motivate the 16-18 year old pupils in school by passing a new law (Associated Press, 1989, August 15). The law states that an adolescent, under the age of 18, must either have a high school diploma or prove that he is still in school in order to obtain a driver's license. If the

student withdraws or misses too many days of school the license could be suspended. Schools are responsible to keep track of students' progress and to keep the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles notified of any problems.

Motivation was also a term being used in association with at-risk children (Associated Press, 1989, August 13). Large classes, poor quality of teachers due to low salaries, unmotivating and uncaring teachers, and uninvolved parents were all factors in the production of unmotivated youth.

The U.S. Department of Education (Kennedy, 1989) reported that 58.6% of Florida's 9th graders will graduate. However, a Florida study said the figure is closer to 71.6%. Officials in the federal department have stated that Florida's statistics are more accurate (McCash, 1990). The nation assigns a higher rate of migration into Florida but fails to account for those who move out of the state. Also, the federal department counts all 9th graders, including those who retained and counted the previous years.

Causative Analysis

As a teacher of adolescents for the past 9 years, the writer feels that she has developed an understanding and awareness of this troubled age. Through membership in various professional organizations, she has remained versed

on the latest developments. Her experience and knowledge give the writer enough confidence to formulate the causes of the at-risk child.

The adolescent years are, in the writer's opinion, the most physically, emotionally, and socially troubled and demanding times for the developing youth. Puberty is a stage over which the teen has very little control. The changes that the child is going through can have positive or negative consequences. It is hoped that a well-adjusted adult will emerge from the adolescent stage. A feeling of self-worth and identity is very important by-product of puberty. Unfortunately, this does not always come to pass, and the result is a child at-risk.

Puberty brings about feelings of doubt, disenchantment, and instability. Everyday means another change for the individual. The youth never knows what to expect to happen next. The child looks in the mirror and sees a person with whom he may not be happy. The displeasure lowers the person's self-esteem, which in turn lessens his self-respect. Failure occurs because of this doubt and low self-esteem. The youth does not feel able to succeed, and hence fulfills the prophecy.

The acquisition of low grades leads to low motivation and disinterest in school. The student thinks too much about himself to think of school. Parties, friends, and having fun are much more important than doing schoolwork.

This lack of motivation will then produce more failure, more disinterest, and a vicious cycle begins. Another reason for the low motivation and interest of the students is the lack of being able to perceive the necessity of what he is learning. When, in the adult life, will the person need to explain the different types of sentences, recite the formulas of geometry, name all the countries and their capitals, or describe how gravity works?

Part of the social change that is occurring for the adolescent is his move from the need for family to the need for friends. The teen needs to feel accepted and liked by others. Peer pressure helps to influence the adolescent. If friends tell the youth that school is not important, to go to the beach instead of school, not to worry about grades, or to dropout when you turn 16, that is precisely what the youth believes and will do.

Peer pressure also can lead to drug use or addiction. Drugs will aid in causing the student to be unmotivated, do less schoolwork, and eventually fail. Teen pregnancy is also a by-product of peer pressure. The pregnant teen usually drops out of school and rarely returns after the birth of the baby.

Parents and the home life of the youth are also possible causes of being at-risk. Some parents abuse their children, physically and/or sexually. The parents, for many

reasons, are not involved enough in the lives of their children. Occasionally, one or both parents are unavailable due to employment. They may be out of town too much or are working several jobs to keep the family together. Some parents just have no time for the youth. The adult's life is more important than the child's. The child leaves school for an empty house, sometimes having no adult supervision until after bedtime. These are the parents who rarely attend open house at schools. Why should the child care about school or himself if his parents do not seem to care?

Children from single parent homes are also at risk. Parents pull the teen in various directions vying for his love. Step-parents, step-siblings, and blood-siblings also play a part at putting the child at-risk. Rivalries within one or more homes destroy the self-esteem and caring nature of the child. The arguing before a divorce or the loss of a parent's support through illness or death also contributes to the problems of the teen.

For some adolescents, lack of parental involvement is not the problem, but instead it is too much involvement. The parents will constantly pressure the teen to bring home high grades. When the teen fails to live up to his parents' expectations, he gets pressured even more. This will lead to rebellion, more failure, and a vicious cycle prevails.

Schools are sometimes at fault in producing at-risk students. Children occasionally do not learn proper study

habits. Middle school teachers assume that elementary teachers have taught such skills and therefore do not repeat the lessons. Some teachers do not even attempt to reinforce study skills.

Another problem for the entering middle school student is the transition from one teacher to six teachers. This drastic change is difficult for some students to accept. One adjustment problem is dealing with six different teaching styles and six different sets of classroom rules. Teachers occasionally forget that not everyone in the class learns at the same rate or with the same style. They teach one way and at one pace and therefore lose some students. Students learn either visually, auditorially, or kinesthetically, or a combination of these. Teachers need to remember this and try to teach to all three modalities.

The schools also pose another problem to students. The school systems necessitate that graduates possess basic skills. In addition to the basic skills, students are required to take a prescribed number of credits in various subjects. Many of these subjects have little to no meaning to students not planning to attend college. There may be one or two vocational schools in the area, but this is not enough to handle the burden of the non-collegians. Either more vocational schools are needed, or regular high schools should teach more job related skills. Offering more signif-

icant classes may help to keep more students in school.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

The current literature supports the writer's contentions about the causes of a child becoming at-risk. Kunisawa (1988) claimed that the nation was not at-risk, but was in a crisis. People, in general, were dropping out from everything, such as marriage, employment, voting, etc. He went on to say that children were coming to school unprepared to learn and face the possibility of reversals. Educators seemed unable to motivate students to look forward to the future.

Teachers are also dropping out of school (Biederman, 1989). It was estimated that about 6% of the country's teachers leave the profession to pursue another field. The reason that teachers dropped out was due to the system. Teachers felt that they are often prevented from doing what they think is best for their students. They become discontent, just like their students. Teacher alienation (Firestone, 1989) brings about student alienation, which in turn fuels teachers to quit.

Classrooms in all types of schools in the United States were at-risk ("Educating children," 1989). Kunisawa (1988) described the dropout as coming from almost any environment. Most were from low income backgrounds, had low academic

skills, non-English speaking homes, parents lacking high school diplomas, and/or single parent homes. Males left to get a job and females left because of pregnancy. Taylor (1989) wrote that children were at-risk of being on welfare and never escaping. She saw children who were destined to live their lives as their parents did. With approximately 60% of the children eventually living in a single parent home, there was not enough support to help the children break the poverty cycle. They did not see schooling as being any help in moving off welfare.

Taylor (1989) also stated several other problems that low income children have. Health, due to little insurance and improper immunizations, kept children out of school for long periods of time, which contributed to failures. Drugs are also a factor. Many babies were born addicted, placed in foster homes, or had no food because money was spent on drugs. Many children were not receiving the parental support needed to help them survive in school. Dropping out was not a sudden decision. It was the finality of years of neglect, inadequacies, and disappointments.

The student was at-risk because he was not involved enough with the school and his learning (Valdivieso, 1987). There did not seem to be enough incentives to keep the adolescent in school. The youth was made to feel inferior when he did not understand the material immediately. School

had no meaning to many of the students.

Weber (1988) believed that dropouts rarely partake in the activities that help to crystallize their future. They do not play sports, join clubs, or go to dances. He also characterized the at-risk youth as having poor skills, weak self-concepts, negative attitudes toward school, lack of family support, and are usually older than their classmates due to retention.

The entire community is to blame for children being at-risk according to Remmes (1989). Parents do not provide secure and solid surroundings. High school graduates are not offered good jobs. Single mothers receive low salaries and have high childcare costs. Teachers are not individualizing instruction enough. Teachers' salaries are not high enough to keep the good teachers. Children are not taught how to cope with disadvantages and overcome them. Children are not provided with a secure place to grow and learn. All of these facts lead to children dropping out of school and society.

Students must be lured back to class (Solorzano, 1986). Many students actually drop out mentally in the fifth grade but stay until they are at the legal age to quit. Students become frustrated and compound their problems by becoming behavioral problems in the classroom. Students cannot deal with the inconsistencies of classroom discipline (Dawson, 1987). Since behavioral rules differ from one class to

another (Eschenmann, 1988), this causes students to become defensive and they associate the classroom with failure. Negative performance (Ruban, 1989) combined with negative attitudes, a poor self-concept, and suspensions from school all contribute to placing the child at-risk. Solorzano (1986) went on to state that many females drop out of school due to of pregnancy. Males leave for job offers. But most leave simply because school does not meet their needs.

Kagan (1988) thought that there were two main reasons for students being at-risk: (1) a single parent, broken home, or nonsupportive family, and (2) a dysfunctional social behavior leading to apathy, withdrawal and disruptive behavior. In a study she conducted to test her theory, Kagan found that teachers were reliable at identifying children at-risk from the characteristics mentioned above. However, teachers sometimes over identified the students who then satisfied the expectations. She also felt that if at-risk youth were identified early, dropping out of school would be prevented.

Bracey (1989) found that the lack of stability was instrumental in children dropping out of school. Students whose families moved often had higher incidence of not graduating. He found that stability was more important than reading or math achievement test scores in predicting success in school.

Packer (1989) felt that the relevancy of school was not enough to keep students from dropping out. The portion of students not going to college was not being taught the skills for future employment, therefore why should they stay in school. Not only did they not learn the skills for jobs, but they were also low in math, reading, and writing skills (Whitman, Shapiro, Taylor, Saltzman, & Auster, 1989). If the students did not know the rewards of graduation, they would not exert themselves (O'Neil, 1989).

Stress was a contributing factor to children having difficulties at school (Omizo, Omizo, & Suzuki, 1988). Agents contributing to stress in the middle school child included general adolescent problems, peer pressure, family problems, not feeling in control, and school-related problems. Low self-esteem in at-risk children was created by anxiety towards school (Matthews & Odom, 1989). Wiggins (1987) thought that low self-esteem promoted low achievement in school. These students were easily frustrated and avoided difficult situations by dropping out.

Underachievers had poor self-concepts (Thompson, 1987). They did not care, lacked skills, saw no purpose to try, had no motivation, and/or did not believe they were capable of succeeding. Their negative self-image promoted a negative attitude and little or no success. Thompson identified four types of student attitudes: (a) the holdout who cannot do it and would not try, (b) the copout who could do it but does

not want to, (c) the dropout who could do it if it did not require much work, and (d) the allout who can do it, wants to do it, and uses all abilities to do it.

Dropouts appear to be loners, rejecting school and themselves (Bearden, Spencer, & Moracco, 1989). They do not respect administrators, teachers, or themselves. The dropout appears to be a victim of a lack of understanding rather than a learning disabled student.

A study (Dobson, Campbell, & Dobson, 1987) was recently done showing the relationship between loneliness and Grade Point Averages [GPAs] of high school juniors. The findings showed that high levels of loneliness created; (a) poor social encounters with peers and teachers, (b) perceptions of school and teachers to be of low quality, (c) low commitment to school, and (d) low GPAs.

One thing that students usually complained about was that teachers were mean and too strict. However, not all students felt this way. A student wrote a letter to Ann Landers (1989) stating that students lacked discipline. Because of this they behaved irresponsibly, became discouraged, thought work was too hard, became bored with less challenging material, and then dropped out of school.

Part of the problem is that teachers are not prepared to deal with students at-risk. They know the symptoms and how to identify the needy students, but they have not been

trained in how to understand why the problem exists and how to eradicate it (Associated Press, 1989, July 27). Another problem is that students do not have an incentive to stay in school. This was the feeling of the Department of Motor Vehicles and the State Board of Education (Associated Press, 1989, August 5, & Kleindienst, 1989). The law, requiring students to remain in school or lose their driver's license (Associated Press, 1990, January 22), was having little effect with some of the students. They stated that they would drive with or without their licenses.

In a study conducted by Minkoff (1989), it was found that the counselors knew the best interventions but rarely, if ever, utilized them. The activities judged to be of lesser importance were the ones being performed. The more important activities were ignored, forgotten, or skimmed over. Those students having little contact with counselors ("Dropouts find," 1990) found work to be more rewarding than school. These students were dissatisfied and turned off by school and were drawn to fulltime employment instead.

Students at-risk at one school (Allen & Gardner, 1989, & Slavin & Madden, 1989) were identified as having poor attendance, low grades, low self-concept, low motivation, poor study skills, but the capability of doing the work. Lilly's Communication Director, Susan Conner, ("Indiana foundation," 1988) said that at-risk kids had special needs that were different from most students. Therefore, they

needed special treatment. The National Conference of State Legislatures [NCSL] ("NCSL issues," 1989) felt that the child at-risk was the third top rated issue facing the new sessions and could not be forgotten.

Schools penalize students by retaining them and grouping them by ability (Lehrer, 1989). This adds to the students' feelings of deficiency. The author added that the schools do not change curriculums to meet the needs of the students. Emotional damage is also a cause of students dropping out of school (Schafer, 1989). Retention in the early grades often leads to feelings of inferiority and anger which results in emotional damage of students.

Barber and McClellan (1987) found that at-risk students were older than classmates, drug abusers, pregnant, living in poverty, and/or underachieving. However, they also said that a major problem was in defining what a dropout was. Every school district followed a different set of guidelines in recording the prevelence of dropouts. In some cities, students who transferred within the district were counted as being a dropout from the original school. One school even reported a dead student as a dropout. With such inconsistencies it is understandable that the percentages of children labeled as at-risk are so high.

The State of Florida and the U.S. Department of Education not only count dropouts differently (McCash, 1990), but

each of Florida's counties also does (Samples, 1990). Florida lists the dropout rate in Broward County as being 5.8% (Kennedy, 1989). But Broward claims the rate is 7.8%. It is also stated (Moore, 1989) that a child could drop out three times in one year and be counted each time as a drop-out. This fact helps to inflate the dropout rates.

School climate, curriculum, positive adult role models, and instructional strategies could help or hinder students (Bergmann, 1989). Students at-risk usually have discipline problems because they cannot seem to follow all of the different rules of the different teachers. They have a bad attitude toward school. The youth are disenchanted and fail to go to classes in subjects that are difficult for them. The students also lack someone who would really listen to them and their problems.

Poor cognitive ability ("Student involvement," 1987) was a major predictor of at-risk children. The students lacked effort, thoroughness, and logical development needed to achieve in school. Conrath (1986) defined school drop-outs as being low in reading skills, behind in grade levels, coming from poverty homes, drug abusers and/or law offend-ers, and lacking in employable skills. But, they do want to learn if given the proper opportunities to do so.

According to Phelan (1987) future dropouts will have a high rate of absenteeism and suspensions, hostile attitudes toward schools and teachers, and low academic accomplish-

ments. Nenortas (1987) proposed the following causes: learning difficulties, low grades, emotional neglect, poor self-concept, failure history, pregnancy, inability to meet standards, burned out, migratory, language or cultural handicaps, lack of home support, and poor relationships with teachers and peers.

Kennedy (1988) claimed a lack of information and understanding about the dropouts is part of the problem. Since the knowledge is lacking, educators are uncertain about the best methods to use in dropout prevention. The Carnegie Council report (1989) stated that adolescents are caught in a pool of risks. The risks include drug abuse, pregnancy, poverty, and discrimination. The decision to drop out is made early in their school career.

Students are exposed to unfair competition (Sartain, 1989, OERI, 1987, & Capuzzi & Gross, 1989), become discouraged, impatient, uncooperative, and ungratified. The disparaging factors include: limited backgrounds, developmental difficulties, physical deprivation, illness, neglect, abuse, emotional disabilities, nonscholastic inclinations, substance addiction, antisocial dispositions, depression, and low self-esteem.

New patterns of social and sexual patterns (Newmann, 1989) emerged during adolescence. They were also being taught material foreign to their emerging interests. This

caused a conflict between the importance of learning what the school was offering and what the youth wanted to learn.

Brannon (1988) believed that teachers of elementary and junior high schools do not think that dropouts are a major problem. Therefore, by the time the students reach high school the problem is too severe to eradicate.

All the literature reviewed attests to the importance of identifying and helping children at-risk. The causes that the authors wrote about are many and varied. Students at-risk suffer from boredom, low self-esteem, low self-concept, disinterest, loneliness, low motivation, and high amounts of stress. At-risk children come from single parent, unstable, and/or low income level homes. They lack discipline, move often, and feel inadequate and out of place. Many youth lack the basic skills needed to succeed or have teachers who are not equipped to meet their needs. Adolescents are changing mentally, physically, and socially which causes problems. These problems lead to school failure. They are pressured by peers to try drugs and sex, which results in drug addiction and/or pregnancy. All of these reasons cannot be neglected. The children of today will be the leaders of tomorrow. Teachers, administrators, parents, and the community cannot allow the future leaders to be dropouts. Everyone must work together to insure that students will have every opportunity of developing into viable adults.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATIONS INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

The ultimate goal of the practicum was to provide a positive atmosphere that would enhance the self-esteem, motivation, and interest of students. This would in turn help to improve their grades. A second expectation was to involve parents in helping their child to have a positive experience in school

Behavioral Objectives

The specific objectives projected for this practicum were as follows:

1. Students will be able to increase homework and classwork production, decrease tardiness and absenteeism, improve organizational skills and study habits, and/or increase test scores through the use of weekly, biweekly, and/or monthly contracts and rewards.

2. Students will be able to fulfill the majority of the contracts that they attempt.

3. Students will decrease tardiness, increase attend-

ance, and improve grades as compared with past years.

4. Students will be able to identify positive and negative thoughts about school at the beginning of the school year. The number of positive experiences will increase and the number of negative factors will decrease when the student is requestioned at the end of the year.

5. Students will be able to identify at least two positive consequences of the dropout prevention.

6. Students will be able to identify at least one change that should be made in order to improve the dropout prevention program.

7. Teachers, administrators, and parents will be able to identify at least two positive consequences of the dropout prevention program.

8. The writer will be able to identify at least two positive consequences of the dropout prevention program.

Measurement of Objectives

The students' individual needs were addressed by means of the contracts. The rewards received were determined by the students. A record of the number of contracts fulfilled and broken were kept in order to evaluate their success. An account of the improved and/or unchanged work habits of the students were also recorded. (See Appendix A for Student Achievement Contract.)

The students were required to answer questions pertaining to discipline, future plans, problems in school, and their likes and dislikes about school and teachers. They were requestioned at the end of the school year in order to determine if the positive and negative aspects of school and their lives have changed. (See Appendix B for Student Questionnaire.)

The students were asked to evaluate the program at the end of the year. They were questioned about which areas of the program helped the most, if they felt it was a productive year, how the program could be improved, and if they would recommend the program for others. (See Appendix C for Student End of the Year Evaluation.)

The students were interviewed individually for a more in-depth response to the usefulness of the program. They also evaluated any changes that had occurred in their personalities, work habits, and lives. Teachers, administrators, and parents who were involved with the program, were also interviewed related to the positive and negative aspects of the program. (See Appendices F and G for Teacher and Parent Evaluations.)

The writer, as a participant and observer, evaluated the effectiveness of the modifications made in the alternative program. She also assessed the reactions and changes of the students involved.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

Many different solutions have been attempted in trying to eliminate, or at least reduce, the amount of at-risk students in today's society. They range from providing small classes to counseling to community involvement. Most of the solutions tried, have helped to some degree, but the proportion is dependent on each individual case. In the text that follows are summaries of various solutions and their degree of success, as reported in the literature cited.

The Carnegie Corporation Study (Washington Post, 1989) recommended that middle schools provide a small, family-like school environment. They also recommended an end to tracking students by ability. Focus had to be on the middle school age group, the group usually forgotten about and yet the most vulnerable. The exact proposals by the Carnegie Council (1989) are as follows: (a) create small communities for learning, (b) teach a core academic program, (c) ensure success for all students, (d) empower teachers and school administrators, (e) staff schools with adolescent, expert

teachers, (f) foster health and fitness, (g) reengage families into education, and (h) connect schools with communities.

Kunisawa (1988) recommends changing the structure of the educational system to meet the changing technological society. He feels that the education system produces dropouts by giving multicultural students a monocultural curriculum. He advocates bringing the business community into the schools and developing a partnership. The businesses would help to train the students while in school and provide jobs upon graduation. This has been tried in various cities with positive results.

The future blue-collar working force (William T. Grant Foundation, 1988) is also being neglected by schools. The dropouts are not prepared with the proper skills nor the required high school diploma to become a part of the working force. Vocational education (Weber, 1988, & Brannon, 1988) needs to be increased. This will reduce the dropout rate and increase the labor force.

Potential dropouts (Monaco & Parr, 1988) need to learn how to interview, proper work habits, and that they can achieve their goals. Vocational education can help in this endeavor. The Department of Education (Kennedy, 1988) helped to promote vocational schools by setting aside $5 million to support such programs. Big business also did its part. Many large corporations (Mabry, 1990) donate sub-

stantial amounts of money to schools that help disadvantaged youth achieve college entrance standards.

Businesses must work with schools to bring about the necessary changes in education. Kearns (1989) recommended the following changes: (a) students choose their schools, (b) year-round universal magnet systems, (c) new teacher-licensing standards, (d) new standards for students, (e) schools teaching democratic values, and (f) Federal government support of such changes.

Two businesses in Medford, Mass. (Wakelee-Lynch, January 18,1990) combined resources to provide a program to keep students in a local high school. The students must be on time for classes, attend regularly, and earn a diploma. In return, they will receive $1000 to defray future college costs. This has helped to reduce the dropout rate from 6% to 3.6% at the Medford High School.

Another supporter for changing the organization of schools is Valdivieso (1987) who agrees that the tracking of students should be eliminated. Progress of students' goals should be rewarded. Students should be given responsibilities within the school. Other recommendations were to reduce class size, provide peer advisors, provide the necessary extra time and help for low ability students to master the material, and provide support from the community and businesses.

Early intervention and public awareness are ways of helping children at-risk (Taylor, 1989). Intervention should begin as early as before birth. This would help to prevent the problems before they even occurred and was considered to be most cost-efficient. Taylor continued by recommending that parents and grandparents tutor children in school and for the at-risk youth to tutor the younger elementary children. Kagan (1989) also stressed the importance of early identification and intervention in reducing the dropout rate.

Remmes (1989) believes that since schools, parents, communities, social services, and the government were causes of the dropout problem, then they all should work together to educate the children at-risk. Solorzano (1986) advocates making the students feel that they can make a difference in the school. He adds that there should be small classes with teachers acting as counselors as well as instructors, and strict attendance and behavior rules. This would help to build their self-esteem.

Students need stability in their lives (Bracey, 1989). This is thought to be an important element in educational success. Parents need to provide more stability by moving less frequently during the middle school years. Stability is also needed in providing a standard definition of what a dropout was (Barber & McClellan, 1987). A consensus has to be reached in order to determine exactly who is at-risk.

Education had to be flexible so that individual needs were met (Shanker, 1988). Because not every student goes to college, programs had to be established that educate the youth in more up-to-date vocational skills. Students should be taught about computers, photocopiers, and fax machines (Packer, 1989), the machinery that they would be operating in today's offices. The skills that were presently being taught in vocational courses would be obsolete within a few years (Whitman, et al, 1989). Curriculums should be updated.

Some researchers advocate an enriched curriculum for the students at-risk (O'Neil, 1989). There are various schools that had success with such programs. The students needed to be challenged mentally. This motivated them to try harder and succeed.

Counselors needed to train students to manage stress, which created at-risk situations in school (Omizo, et al, 1988). Teachers should be trained to help children to manage stress also. Counselors also should conduct classes that enhanced self-esteem and increases self-control. Thompson (1987) added that counselors needed to motivate students into believing that they were capable of achieving that goals and reach their potential.

Champeau (1983) advocated for counselors to establish a one-to-one friendly relationship with an at-risk student.

The counseling sessions should promote self-concept, building a caring relationship, and time management. Of the initial 18 students, only 4 dropped out of school. The remaining students improved attendance, grades, and interpersonal relationships. Another program favoring the help of counselors (Schmidt, 1988) provided a comprehensive K-12 plan. At-risk students would be identified early, parents would be educated, and both would be integrated into a total program. At each school level appropriate skills would be incorporated into the education of both students and parents.

Components of another program (Bearden, et al, 1989) included tutorial services, alternative classes, work related activities, parental involvement, staff and environmental support, counseling, and peer support groups. Ruben's (1989) program was comprised of ten group sessions that taught about success, responsibility, ability to respond and listen, ability to ask for help, cooperation with teachers and students, and building on strengths rather than weaknesses. This helped to raise the self-esteem of the participants.

Allen and Gardner (1989) started a program that provided extra attention to at-risk students. They provided tutoring, enhanced study skills, and provided rewards for meeting short-term goals. They had considerably reduced the dropout rate at their school since this program had been in

use. A similar project (Marcus, 1989) was being instituted in Florida. College students volunteered to serve as tutors, role models, and advisors to at-risk students in high school.

Some believed that stricter discipline was needed (Landers, 1989). It helped to create a sense of responsibility and enhance self-esteem. Discipline prevented students from becoming irresponsible and lazy. Discipline taught respect for themselves and others (Bergmann, 1989). Guidance counselors should help to establish a well defined discipline program. They also should help to provide at-risk students with an advocate at school. This advocate should be a peer and/or adult who would be consistent in providing guidance for the student.

Teachers needed to be involved in deciding the best curriculum to meet the needs of children at-risk ("Educating children," 1989). The solutions should be developed by teachers because it is the teachers who would be having the most contact with the youth. The Board of Regents agreed (Associated Press, July 27,1989) that teachers were the most important members of the helping group. The programs at the universities were going to be changed to include strategies in helping the future teachers deal with the at-risk student.

The courts and legislation helped to provide schools

with extra leverage in keeping potential dropouts in class (Associated Press, 1989, August 5, & 1989, August 15; & Kleindienst, 1989). The new law stated that any student, under the age of 18, who was not in school and did not have a high school diploma, would not be able to get a driver's license. Schools have the legal right to notify the Department of Motor Vehicles if a student dropped out or missed too many days of school. The message was clear: "Students drive. Dropouts do not" (Kleindienst, 1989, p. 9A).

Within one month of the new law being enforced 182 notices of license suspensions were sent (Samples & Moore, 1989). A Broward County student was the first to be notified. But is this new law helping to prevent students from dropping out of school? It seems to be working even though, statewide (Associated Press, January 22, 1990), 2,138 students have had their licenses suspended. Students that did dropout have returned (Samples, 1990). One hundred seventy two Broward County students have returned to school, 553 students signed attendance agreements, 292 have been recommended for suspension of their driver's licenses, and 4 have filed appeals. The new law is working to reduce student dropouts in other counties as well.

One student, in Palm Beach County (Moore, 1990), successfully challenged the new law. She dropped out of school and had a full-time job in order to help support her family. By proving hardship, she kept her driver's license in March,

just one month before she turned 18 years old. Even if she had lost, her license would have been reinstated as soon as she reached her 18th birthday.

The Lilly Endowment ("Indiana foundation," 1988) was so committed to helping at-risk students that they provided grants to schools for the creation of special programs. Several of the procedures used were mentor programs, peer counseling, peer tutors, and community assistance groups.

The school environment had to be changed if dropout prevention was to be successful (Lehrer, 1989). Accelerated remedial courses, innovative teaching, summer programs, vocational programs, tutoring, positive environment, and a flexible curriculum were all ways of providing help for the potential dropout. Computer companies were helping the cause by creating software with real life dilemma themes to be used by the at-risk student ("Teaching at-risk," 1989).

The restructuring of classrooms should help to motivate at-risk students (Eschenmann, 1988). His five recommendations include: (a) teachers should have a motivating style, (b) curriculum should be challenging and varied, (c) teachers should teach according to the students learning style, (d) classroom should be managed and organized in order to promote motivation and a variety of activities, and (e) evaluation and assessment of students should be modified to agree with the tasks being tested.

Schafer (1989) suggested several alternatives to retention of students. Individualized curriculums should be developed, extend school hours, and add supplemental resources to the classroom. She indicated that retention should only take place in cases of extreme immaturity or an illness.

Because black students are numerous among the ranks of dropouts (Wakelee-Lynch, 1990, February 8), the D.C. school officials developed a curriculum on African-American studies. It is hoped that by creating more interesting studies, fewer pupils will dropout of school.

Since students do not "understand what it means to understand something" (p. 62), Pogrow (1990) advocated to teach students using computers and a Socratic dialogue. The teachers would (a) understand answers instead of rating them right or wrong, (b) probe answers to allow students to construct their own understanding, and (c) guide students to discover information on their own.

One program that showed a high success rate was SWAS, school within a school (Welch & McKenna, 1988) . This was a temporary, self-contained placement for at-risk students. A teacher and aide provided individual instruction until the student was ready to return to his regular classroom. It was estimated that 84% of the students improved academically.

The Valued Youth Partnership (1986) was a program spon-

sored by Coca-Cola. At-risk students were made to feel important by serving as tutors of younger children. The young students learned, as did the tutors. The program was proven successful with a decline in absenteeism and referrals, and an improved self-concept among the at-risk students.

An individual and group counseling program (Turner, 1985) was instituted to help at-risk children. The sessions provided opportunities to express feelings, learn problem solving techniques, promote positive self-image, and acquire a sense of responsibility. Psychodrama, role playing, and rap sessions were all part of the program.

Conrath (1986) believed that the reactions of adults were helpful. The adult should expect success, confront behaviors that hamper success, teach at the students' competency level, emphasize process, insist on personal responsibility, utilize practical applications, and be an authoritative leader. The teacher also should clarify everything, be patient, and allow homework to be started in class. Goals set should be short-term, attainable, significant to students, and offer challenge.

A comprehensive PK-12 approach (Slavin & Madden, 1989) ensured student success throughout their years in school. The five step plan was as follows: (a) school is responsible for success of students, (b) success is expensive, (c) empha-

size prevention, (d) emphasize change in the classroom, and (e) remedial programs should be used as a last resort. The program should be comprehensive, intense, and adaptable to individual needs in order to be effective.

Hamby (1989) stated that the myths about at-risk students need to be dispelled before any intervention will succeed. He advocated keeping the community informed, and keeping the students coming to school, learning, secure, involved, and coping with life. The education should be enhanced directed, and focused.

The OERI Urban Superintendents Network (1987) formulated six strategies for school to use when dealing with potential dropouts. The strategies are: (a) intervene early, (b) create a positive school climate, (c) set high expectations, (d) select and develop strong teachers, (e) provide a broad range of instructional programs, and (f) initiate collaborative efforts.

Description of Selected Solutions

From all of the solutions presented in the literature, it was clear to see that some form of intervention was needed. As long as the strategies were effective, the dropout rate could be reduced. Intervention could work at any age as long as continued support was provided.

It appeared that the best solution was to furnish a

school environment that was enhanced with counseling, tutoring, well defined disciplinary rules, and parental involvement. The at-risk students were involved with the program by selecting incentives that they received if they reduced tardiness and absences, and increased self-esteem, motivation, interest and grades.

For the past several years, there had been an alternative program for children at-risk at the writer's school. There had been a moderate degree of success. The writer was hoping that by adding several components to the program more success would be obtained. The alternative classes were set up in the following manner. The classes ranged in size from 10-18 students. There were two teachers who instructed the pupils in two subjects apiece. One taught math and science, the other taught language arts and social studies. Therefore, each teacher had the students for two hours. The students were also mainstreamed into two elective classes.

This semi-self-contained approach appeared to be easier on the teachers and students. The teachers knew most of the characteristics of the pupils because of the amount of time spent with them. The students had fewer rules to learn and only two teaching styles to contend with instead of the usual four.

In late May, the 6th and 7th grade teachers at the school were requested to recommend any of their students for

inclusion into the alternative program for the ensuing school year. The 5th grade teachers at the feeder elementary schools were also requested to do the same. The recommendations were made based on low grades, low achievement test scores, low motivation, poor attendance, poor conduct, and/or disinterest. The ones who were ultimately chosen for the program had low or failing grades in two or more subjects, 50% or less on two or more areas on the achievement tests, and two or more problem areas such as low motivation, disinterest, poor attendance, or poor conduct. Several students were retained in the program for the following year, while several were mainstreamed back into regular classes.

In early June, the parents of the most needy students were contacted by a guidance counselor. The program was explained, as well as the reasons for recommending their child. The parents had to sign a consent form if they decided to allow their child into the program. Three groups were formed, one in each of the three grades 6th, 7th, and 8th.

At the beginning of the 1989-1990 school year, the teachers in the Alternative Department decided upon the class rules. It was felt that the consistency would be beneficial, especially for any students who were retained in the program in future years. The writer and the other 7th/8th grade alternative teacher decided which strategies

would be implemented this year in order to increase the degree of success.

During the first month of the school, both teachers got to know the characteristics of the students involved. They identified the concerns and problems for each individual student. They then conferred and decided what each student's goals would be for the year. Parents were informed about the use of contracts, field trips, counseling sessions, peer tutoring, and hopefully their involvement in helping the students reach their goals. (See Appendix D for Parental Letter.)

The writer administered a questionnaire to the students. (See Appendix B.) Appropriate rewards were chosen for each student. Then, weekly contracts were established with the students, teachers, and in some cases, parents. (See Appendix A.) As students fulfilled the contracts, rewards were administered. The timeframe of the contracts increased as the year progressed. At first, each goal was given one week to be reached. Then, the time was increased to biweekly. Some of the possible rewards included game playing on computers, pizza parties, field trips, outdoor activities, free day, popcorn treats, and/or listening to music while doing classwork.

In addition to the contracts, the writer conducted weekly counseling sessions. The students were allowed to

discuss any problems that were currently bothering them. Field trips to the local jail and courthouse were planned. It was also hoped that the students could go to the local Al Anon facility or have someone from the facility come to the school as a guest speaker. One student was an admitted alcoholic, and several other students alluded to the fact that they drank alcoholic beverages. It was hoped that the visit could help prevent these students and others from following the path of an alcoholic.

The writer also established a mentor program with the gifted department. She and the gifted science teacher joined classes for labs and other activities. A gifted student was paired with an alternative student. It was hoped that the students developed a helping relationship.

During the second semester, the writer created a program with the 8th grade alternative students acting as tutors. They helped the 6th grade alternative students pass their skills.

The reading teacher, who instructed the 8th grade alternative students, conducted a Project Business class. This took place once a week. A person from a local business came to the class to teach the students about the job possibilities. The students learned how to fill out job applications and what employment opportunities existed. Workbooks and group projects were also a part of the program.

The writer added other field trips, guest speakers, and

projects as the year progressed. She had hoped to involve the parents and administrators in several of the weekly counseling sessions. The number of contracts fulfilled and broken were recorded. The grades, test scores, and absences were indicated and compared with those from last year. Parents were informed about the progress of the students at various intervals throughout the year.

At the conclusion of the year, the students received the questionnaire again. The attitudes about school were compared to those previously answered. The students were asked to evaluate the program. (See Appendix C.) Parents, teachers, and administrators involved were also asked to evaluate the program.

This approach hopefully had some positive results. The writer included many of the solutions previously found to be helpful in preventing the students from dropping out of school. As more literature was reviewed and the needs of the students changed, other components were added to the program.

The writer was responsible for coordinating the program, keeping track of all recorded progress, helping the other teachers involved; establishing the contracts, mentor, and tutoring programs; conducting the counseling sessions, keeping in close contact with parents and administrators, and administering the questionnaires and evaluations. In

addition, she was responsible for teaching math and science to the 7th and 8th grade alternative students and teaching 6th grade health.

Report of Action Taken

The month of September was spent doing preliminary work. The writer observed and evaluated the students that were involved with the practicum. She began with 14 seventh graders and 14 eighth graders. The exact number of students fluctuated throughout the year as several students were mainstreamed and new students entered the program. Following a month of observations the needs of the students were established.

The seventh grade group was fairly cohesive. Most of the students were functioning on the same level. Several students were lower in capabilities, but tried hard to succeed. Some of the problems observed were lack of organizational skills, poor study habits, low self-concept and motivation, and disinterest.

The eighth grade class was more problematic. Several of the students were behavior problems and attempted to disrupt the learning process. The students were functioning on various levels. This created frustration for some and boredom for others. Observations made yielded many of the same problems found in the seventh grade class.

In the beginning of October, progress reports were sent home to the parents. These were accompanied by a letter explaining the components of the alternative program. (See Appendix D.) The students were requested to answer the questionnaire during class. (See Appendix B.) Utilizing the answers from the questionnaires and the observations of the teachers involved, individual goals for each student were synthesized. From these objectives, contracts were drafted between the teacher and each of the students. Students selected their own rewards. The time period for the contracts started with durations of one week.

The eighth grade class, during reading, began Project Business. An American Express representative came every Wednesday to explain various aspects of the business. Each week a different phase was discussed. During the first session, a model store was simulated. They learned about costs, overhead, expenditures, and profits. The second class had the students establishing a corporation. They experienced the process of owning, buying, and selling shares of the corporation.

The writer met with the teacher of the gifted science program in order to begin a mentorship program with the two classes. A project, which required cooperative learning between groups of students was designed. It was decided that the groups would be combined during the following

month.

Weekly "rap" or counseling sessions began. The students were free to discuss any problems that they had encountered. The first few sessions were fairly short. Once the students began to feel comfortable with the sessions they began to be more productive. Subjects discussed included problems with teachers, students, parents, and school in general.

Another component introduced to the students was a puzzle of the week. Every week a word puzzle, math puzzle, or logic puzzle was given to the students. If they solved the puzzle within the week, they received 5-10 bonus points. The points would be added to the grades of the students at the end of each quarter.

Many students entered or left the program during October. One 7th grader returned from a month in a local psychiatric institute. Problems at home forced her mother to admit her to the institute. She appeared to be calmer and more willing to work after her return. Two students, a 7th and 8th, moved out of the school zone. Another 8th grader left to attend a local vocational school. Finally, one 8th grader was placed in a facility for chemical dependency. He was to have been gone for two weeks, however, he did not return until the end of January.

During the month of November, the contracts continued on a weekly basis. Every Monday, the students decided upon

their goal for the week, and the reward that would be received if the contract was fulfilled. On Friday, or the following Monday, the terms of the contract were reviewed in order to determine if the goals were met. If the contract was successfully completed, the students received their reward. A new contract for the following week was then written. The success and failure of every contract was recorded. The written contracts were also filed along with other important papers of each student.

The counseling sessions also continued throughout November. Time was usually set aside on Fridays. Some weeks the sessions were longer than others. The Project Business sessions perpetuated as well. During this month the students learned how to write job applications and how to prepare for job interviews. The interviews were video-taped and viewed the following week.

A trip to the County Fair was planned for later in November. The permission slips were sent home and money collected. The morning at the fair was spent viewing the exhibitions. After a picnic lunch, the group came back to school. The students then went to their last two classes.

The seventh grade alternative class was joined by the eighth grade gifted class for four consecutive Wednesdays. They were put into random groups of two, one alternative student and one gifted student. They were given the task of

building a car from scrap materials. It had to move under its own power, no batteries or motors could be used. The students were informed that they would be receiving a grade for their efforts, which helped to motivate them. The first week was spent deciding upon the materials that would be used and what each student would contribute. The next two weeks the students spent the classtime constructing their vehicles. On the fourth week, races were held. Each group sent their car down the ramp twice. The distances for each trial were marked. The cars traveling the longest distances were raced again. Grades were given to each group, as well as prizes to the winning team.

Two topics mentioned during the counseling sessions became new components of the eighth grade class. One student complained about being anxious and nervous when taking tests. The writer administered relaxation techniques to the class. She also played a cassette with relaxing music during the next math test. The students felt more at ease and asked that the tape be played again during future tests.

The second topic discussed was concerning the possibility of having a student teach a class. They wanted the experience of being a teacher. One student was given the task of preparing a lesson that was taught to the class the following week. The writer acted as a student during the experiment. She interrupted, asked unrelated questions, and tried to show the acting teacher how difficult it was to

control the class and teach at the same time. After the student calmed down from her ordeal, the class decided that teaching was not an easy task and they would wait several months before another student would attempt to teach the class.

Population changes also occurred during the month of November. An eighth grade student was mainstreamed into regular classes. His grades dropped slightly during the first marking period in regular classes. He, however, raised his grades to be on the A honor roll for the remainder of the 8th grade. Another student, in the 7th grade, also made a change. She was administratively promoted from the 7th to the 8th grade. She remained in the alternative program. The 7th grade received a new student who was failing her regular classes. With all of the changes, the 7th grade now had 13 students and the 8th grade class had 9.

The existing components of the practicum continued throughout December. The weekly contracts and counseling sessions remained a part of the classes. Project Business, in the eighth grade class, ended with an auction that helped to teach about supply and demand. The relaxation tape was played periodically in both classes.

Two new segments were added to the practicum. The peer counselors, in the school, started a six week self-esteem group for the alternative classes. They met, once a week

with each of the two groups. They used role plays, group sharing, and positive praise in order to improve the self-esteem of the students. The writer only observed one of the sessions for a brief period of time as it was felt that she might inhibit the responses of the students. The peer counselors also wanted the group to be a strictly student experience with very little input from teachers.

The second addition was courtesy of the county. A dropout prevention program, "Dropping out: A Long Road Taken" (Kauffman, Viens, & Roesch, 1989), was created using high school students who have dropped out or have been in trouble. These students talked to middle school students in an attempt to prevent some of the same mistakes from occurring again. The program utilized a video of the high school students, teachers, administrators, and the school resource officer. It also included youth involved in a resident school for drug and behavior rehabilitation, a teen pregnancy program, and obtaining a GED.

The program was divided into 35 lessons. Each lesson consisted of pre-questions of a general nature, and post-questions, asking specifics of the video session. There were also activities for the students to perform that enhanced the objectives of the lesson. These exercises became the weekly counseling sessions. They provided a distinct topic to be discussed and were helpful in eradicating the at-risk characteristics displayed by many of the students

involved.

January brought several changes to the program. Several new students entered the class while others left. The male who had been in the chemical dependency facility returned to school. Another student who was failing in his regular classes entered the 8th grade class. A female, who had been working hard, began to skip school often. Her family life was creating problems that she could not handle. After several weeks of erratic attendance she was withdrawn from school and sent to another.

The contracts, self-esteem groups, and the video counseling sessions continued. The other alternative teacher used the contracts for special projects that he conducted in his Language Arts class. It was decided that a pizza party would be given for all students fulfilling 75% of their contracts for both teachers. The few students who did not receive the pizza were allowed to view a video entitled "Twice Pardoned." It told the story of a man who had turned to drugs and crime when he dropped out of school. He was lecturing to a large group of middle and high school students explaining how during his second stay in prison he befriended a boy who became his savior. The boy visited the man through the fence in the play area of the prison. The gentleman was able to realize his mistakes as he helped the teen overcome some of the same problems.

The alternative classes also took a trip to the local detention center. The students were escorted through several sections of the center. Two inmates were introduced to the students. They told the students why they were there and also about their bleak futures in prison. The inmates talked from the heart when they pleaded with the students not to drop out of school and to stay away from drugs and crime. The students, who were very outspoken on the way to the detention center, became subdued on the return trip. The alternative teachers discussed the experience with the students prior to allowing them to proceed to their next class. It was later discovered that both the 7th and 8th grade groups continued to discuss their experiences in their next class.

The month of February saw the continuation of the dropout counseling sessions and the ending of the self-esteem group. A new student entered the 8th grade class. She was born in the United States but lived the last seven years in Brazil. She was struggling to remember English. A change was instituted with the contracts. The classes began to extend the contracts to two weeks instead of only one week. Due to the large failure rate with the two week contracts, it was mutually decided that the length of the contracts would fluctuate. One would be a one week, followed by a two week, and then return to a one week contract. The students felt less intimidated and more successful by

receiving rewards more frequently.

A cooperative project between the 7th and 8th grade alternative classes began. In conjunction with the national census, the group assumed the responsibility of learning about the census, preparing a census for the school, administering the survey, and compiling the results. This project lasted through the months of February and March.

The students learned why the census was taken, the importance of counting everyone, and the importance of asking the right questions. The alternative group sponsored a poster contest. The students in the school were to create a poster representative of the importance of being counted in the census. Prizes were awarded to the first, second, and third place winners. Certificates were also presented to all the participants.

While the poster contest was underway, the alternative students were formulating questions that would be important for future school use. The questions were then prepared and distributed to the Social Studies classes. The teachers returned the completed surveys to the alternative students. They, then, hand-counted the questionnaires according to grade levels. The data were collated and a final report was prepared. This report was given to the Social Studies teachers so that the results could be revealed to the students. The administrators also received a copy of the

results.

The 7th grade class was also introduced to another project in Science. They were to research a unique animal, write a report, make a 3-D model of the animal, and then present the model and report to the rest of the class. With each student reporting on a different animal, the students were able to learn about many instead of just a few new animals. The students were given two months to work on this project, both in class and at home. The reports were presented in April.

During March, the contracts, weekly dropout counseling sessions, census project, and animal project continued. The students were treated to two guest speakers. The first was a counseling from Anon-Anew. He talked about his problems with drug addiction, family, and school. He also told the class about the facilities where he worked. The class listened and asked questions for about 1 1/2 hours.

The second speaker was a student from a local high school who had thoughts of dropping out while in middle school and then became "turned on" to school during the 10th grade. He discussed creating reachable goals and promoted motivational techniques. The students were greatly interested in what he had to say to them.

There was another shift in populations during March. A new student entered the 7th grade class. She came from the bilingual center and was trying to become proficient in

English. Another student, who entered the 8th grade in February, left to go to the bilingual center. She was not able to learn the subjects while trying to relearn English.

The results of the census project were distributed the first week of April. An 8th grader left the school to enter a facility for chemical dependency and behavioral disorders. The continuation of the contracts and dropout counseling sessions remained unchanged. The 7th grade class completed and presented their animal projects. A new project was introduced to the 8th grade class. Each student was to chose a physical science topic, research it, and teach it to the class. This was to be handled differently from the attempt at student teaching in November. The writer did not become a student within the class. Her role was strictly as an observer and evaluator.

It was also decided that the 8th grade group would become mentors of the 6th grade alternative class. Arrangements were made to combine the two classes for a special project. This was to take place the following month.

In May, the contracts became strictly biweekly. This continued until the end of the year. The dropout counseling sessions continued weekly. In an effort to be sure that all 35 lessons of the program were completed, two or more were now being presented each week. The 8th grade group completed their research and presented their knowledge to the rest

of the class.

The final shift in class numbers occurred this month. A 7th grader was returned to regular classes. Her mother did not feel she was benefiting from the classes. The 8th grade student who left several months ago for personal reasons, returned to finish out the year here. She, however, maintained her unstable attendance record.

For three consecutive weeks, the 6th and 8th grade alternative classes met for one period on Wednesdays. They repeated the project that the alternative and gifted groups did in November. The groups consisted of two 6th graders and one 8th grader. They built and raced their vehicles and received prizes and grades for their efforts.

The students were treated to the showing of two movies dealing with motivation and self-esteem. The parents' permission was requested and received. The students saw "Lean on Me" and "Stand and Deliver." They enjoyed both films, and agreed they were worth watching.

On the last day of May, the Special Education and Alternative Departments combined groups for a field day. The learning disabled and alternative students, grades 6-8, were placed into eight groups. Two groups competed against each other at one of four stations. The events included softball, volleyball, relay races, and ball tosses. Every 45 minutes the groups changed stations. Following the end of the competition, the students had a picnic lunch. They then

were brought indoors to relax and watch a movie. Prizes were awarded to the top three groups.

In June, the dropout counseling sessions were concluded. The students received a diploma for their participation in the program. The contracts ended as of June 8. This was followed by final exams for the students. During the week before final exams, the students received the questionnaires that were answered in October. Several questions were added and one was deleted. (See Appendix E for amended Student Questionnaire.)

The students, parents, teachers, and administrators were asked to complete the evaluations for the program. (See Appendices C, F, and G for Evaluations.) Students, teachers, administrators, and several parents were also interviewed in person or by telephone. The purpose of the interviews was to evaluate further the components of the practicum.

The writer obtained the data from the previous year concerning absences, tardies, grades, and achievement test scores of the students. These were compared to the data of the same material from the present year. Using the comparisons and evaluations of those involved, the writer then formulated her own conclusions concerning the success and failure of the various components of her practicum. The results of this work are presented in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Results

The writer was satisfied with the overall results of the practicum. Even though it appeared that several students did not improve, many others did. The students showed improvements in grades, attendance, and test scores. Most felt that it had been a productive year.

The contracts were either a huge success or a complete fiasco. Some of the goals that the students set for themselves were completion of homework, coming to class on time, improving their behavior, and doing odd jobs within the classroom. The rewards were also varied. The students chose candy, soda, snacks, certificates to parents, and/or ten bonus points to be added to their grades.

Many students used the contracts as a force impelling them to succeed. They did whatever the contract said to do, and were anxious to receive their reward. For these students, homework was completed on a daily basis, they were on time for class, they did not misbehave, and they looked forward to coming to school. The students also maintained organized notebooks and improved their quiz and test scores.

Unfortunately, not all students felt driven to fulfill

their contracts. Several thought that the contracts were a big joke. They did not care about the rewards and therefore did not improve on any of their problems, or showed only minor improvements. For these students only a few of the contracts were completed. These completions were sporadic throughout the year. Even though the contracts were not a complete success, the mere fact that at least half of the students benefited from them, made the contracts worthwhile. The percentages of students fulfilling the contracts are presented in Figure 1.

Looking at the total picture, the contracts were successful. When the students were given an extra incentive to fulfill the contracts, more were satisfied. The weeks before and after vacations also saw a reduction in the amount of contracts that were successfully completed. The exact numbers, as well as percentages, of contracts fulfilled can be seen in Figures 2 and 3.

Absences, tardies, final report card grades, and achievement test scores from last year and the present were compared. Many of the students showed gains in their final grades. Several students decreased on their report cards, and several stayed relatively the same. The students who did worse gave up towards the end of the year. They real-

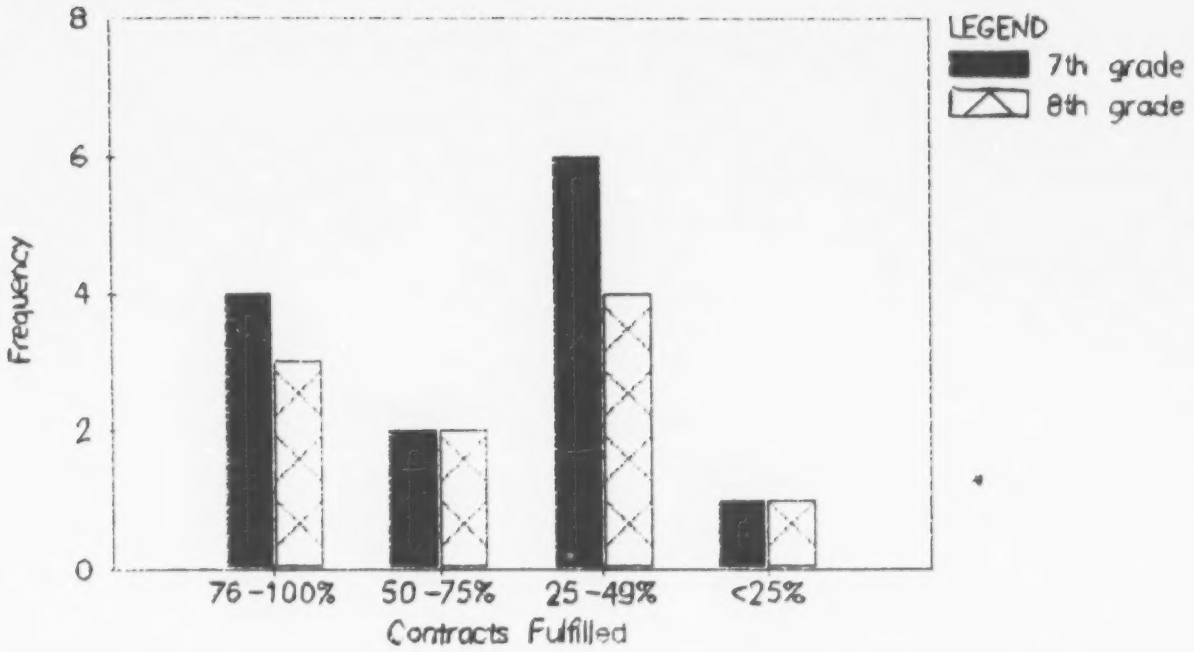

FIGURE 1 NUMBER OF STUDENTS FULFILLING CONTRACTS

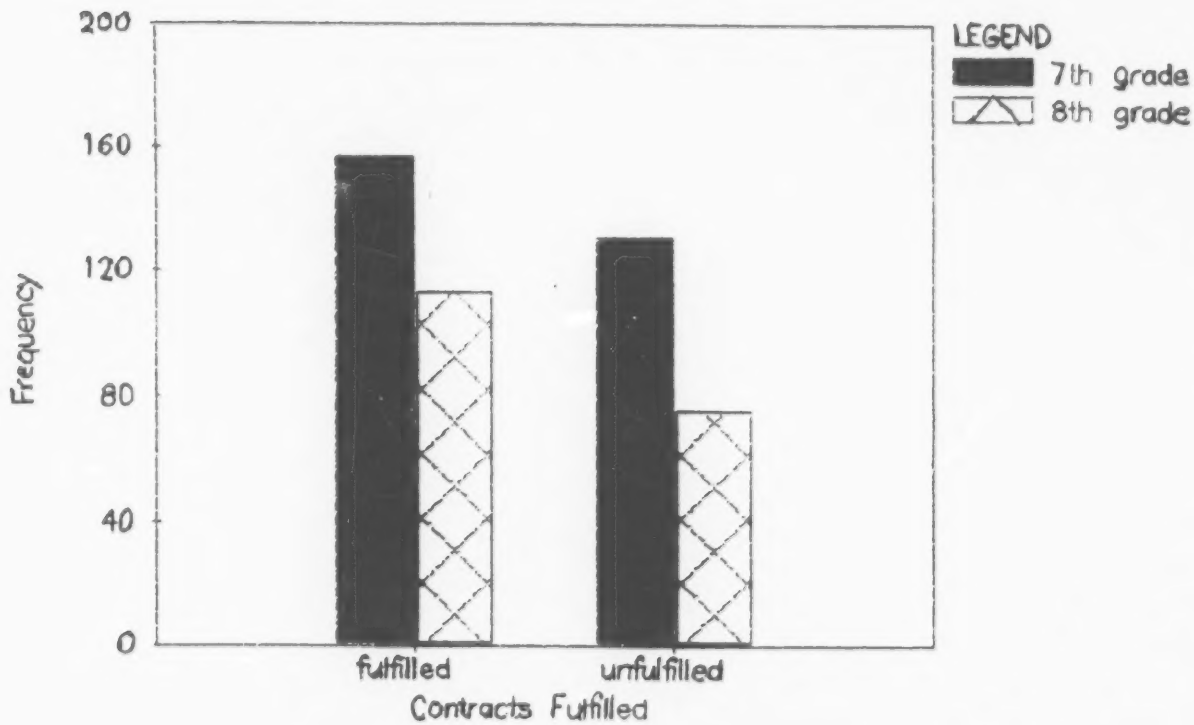

FIGURE 2 FREQUENCY OF CONTRACTS FULFILLED

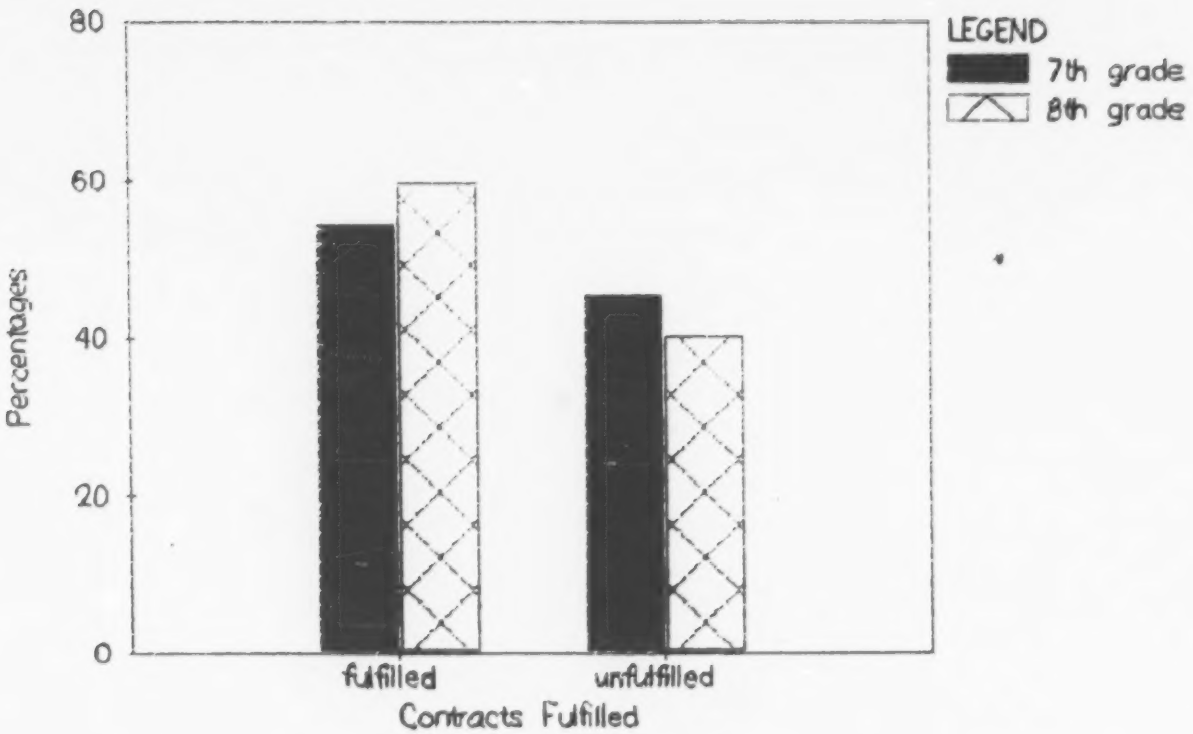

FIGURE 3 PERCENTAGES OF CONTRACTS FULFILLED

ized that they lacked the motivation to continue, even though they had shown some improvement. The results from the comparisons of grades are shown in Figure 4.

The number of students who were absent during the year decreased although a few students did show increases in absences. Several of these students eventually withdrew to be placed in special resident programs. Until they were officially withdrawn, the students continued to be counted as absent. Tardiness to school did not decrease. For many students the amount of times that they arrived late to school remained the same, while for others it increased. They were all on time for first period and were late for homeroom only. The students, according to their admissions, did show decreases in tardiness to class. The exact comparisons of this fact are impossible to make. Teachers do not keep records of tardiness to class from one year to the next. Figures 5 and 6 show the results from the comparisons of absenteeism and tardiness.

As indicated in Figure 7, most of the students did show gains in their achievement test scores. These tests are taken in the spring of each school year. Only a few of the pupils decreased on the majority of the subjects tested. There were several students who did not take the test last year, and therefore, comparisons could not be made for them

The students continued to have positive and negative

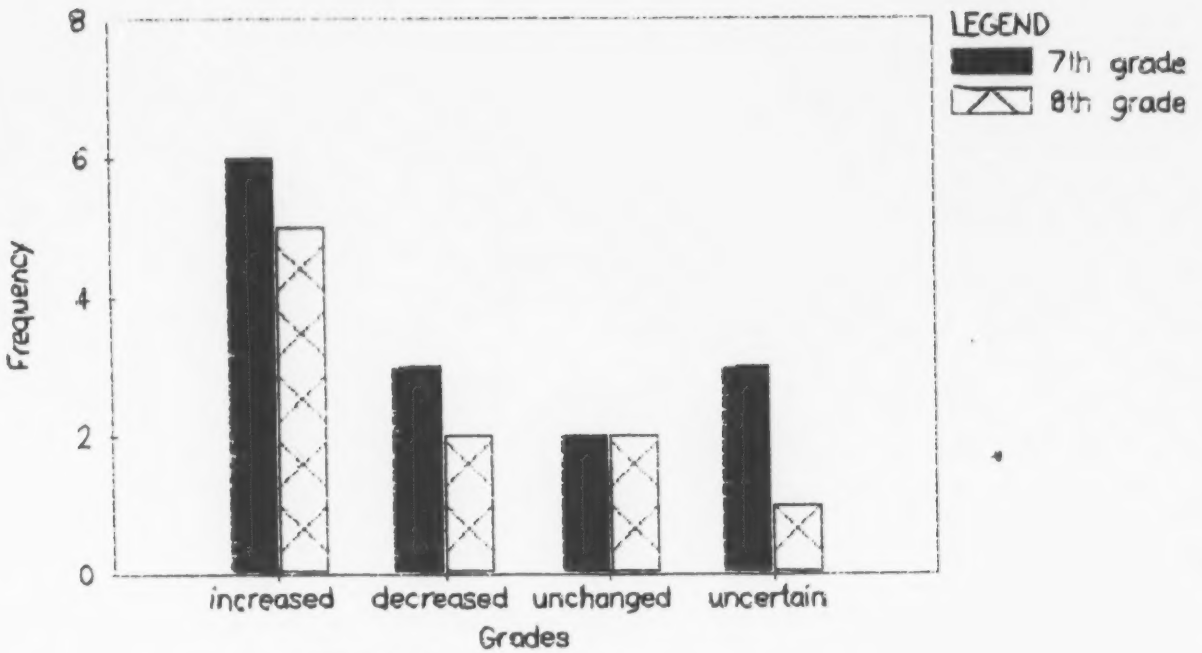

FIGURE 4 COMPARISON OF 1989 & 1990 FINAL GRADES

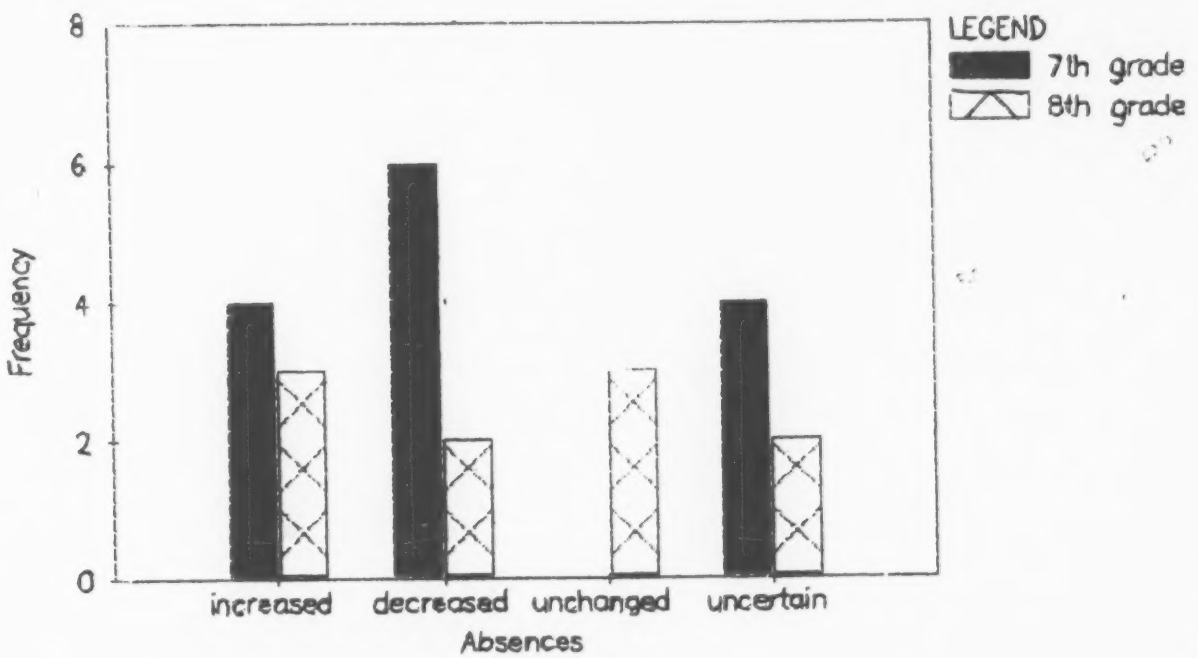

FIGURE 5 COMPARISON OF 1989 & 1990 ABSENTEEISM

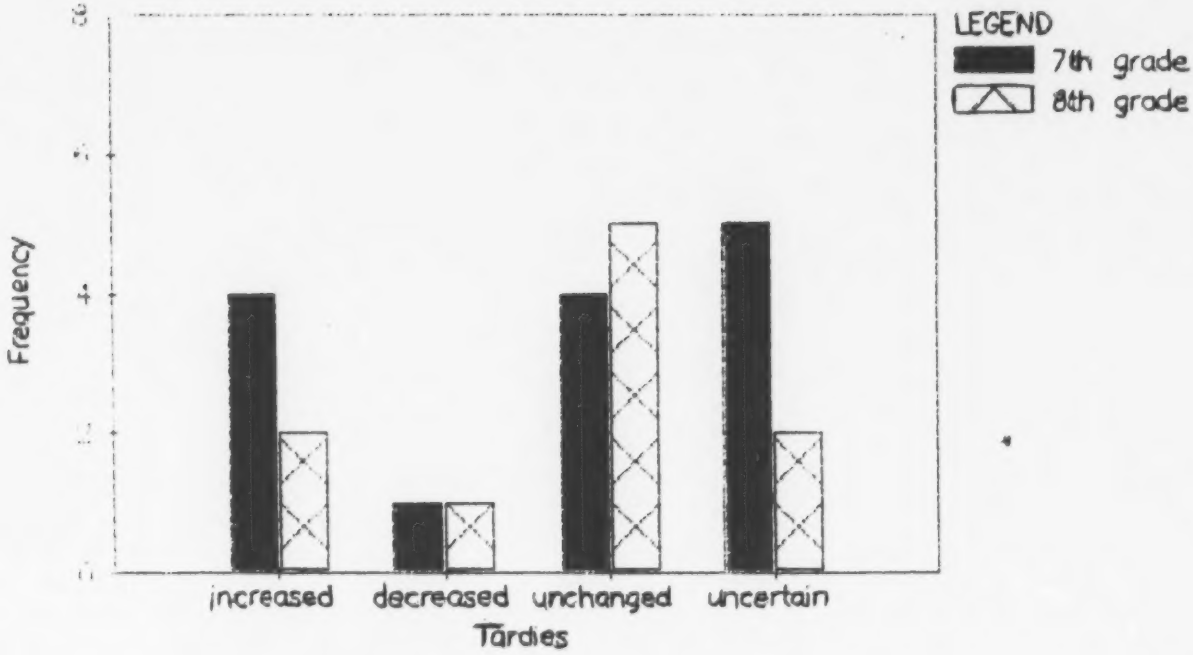

FIGURE 6 COMPARISON OF 1989 & 1990 TARDINESS

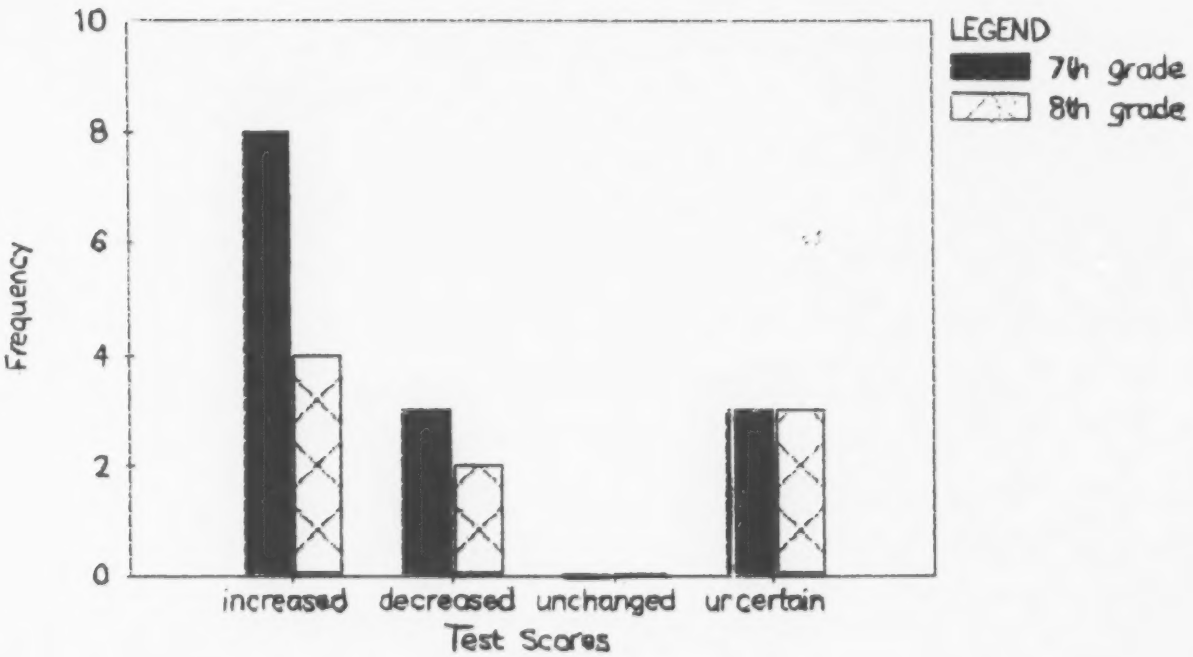

FIGURE 7 COMPARISON OF ACHIEVEMENT TEST SCORES

thoughts about school. Because of the changes in population of the alternative classes from October to June, the two months that the questionnaires were given, it appears that there was no change in the thoughts of dropping out of school. The results are displayed in Figure 8.

Thoughts about the discipline in the class and the items that they learn best from also showed changes from October to June. The majority of the students thought that they learned best from discussions and movies. They learned the least from field trips, games, and book reports. However, they all seem to request more game days and field trips. In October, more students wanted a relaxed form of discipline. In June, the students were more in favor of a mixture of strict and relaxed. The statistics are shown in Table 1 and Figure 9.

Some interesting data were found from the questionnaires. Certain questions were asked in order to elicit information regarding the relationship of the alternative students with the characteristics of a potential dropout. In agreement with facts stated in the literature, the writer found many of her students as having attended many schools. One student attended three schools this year, and about 20 within her eight years in school. Most of the students involved in this program do not work after school.

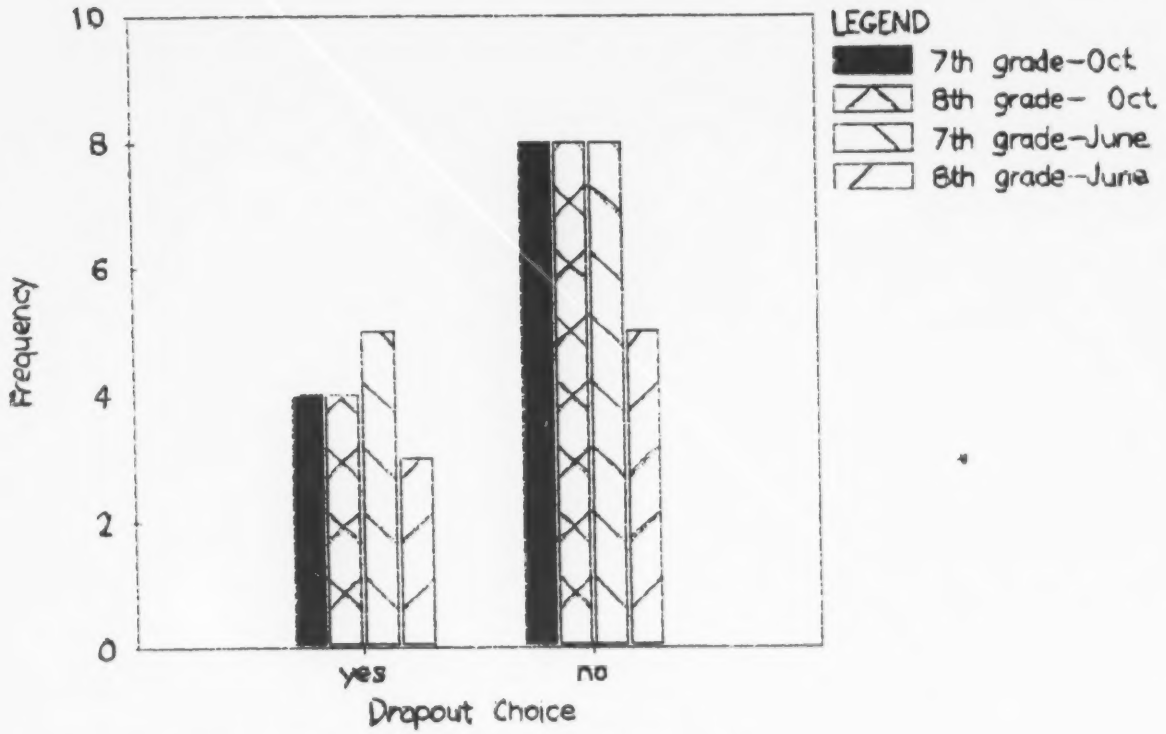

Figure 8 STUDENTS CONSIDERING DROPPING OUT

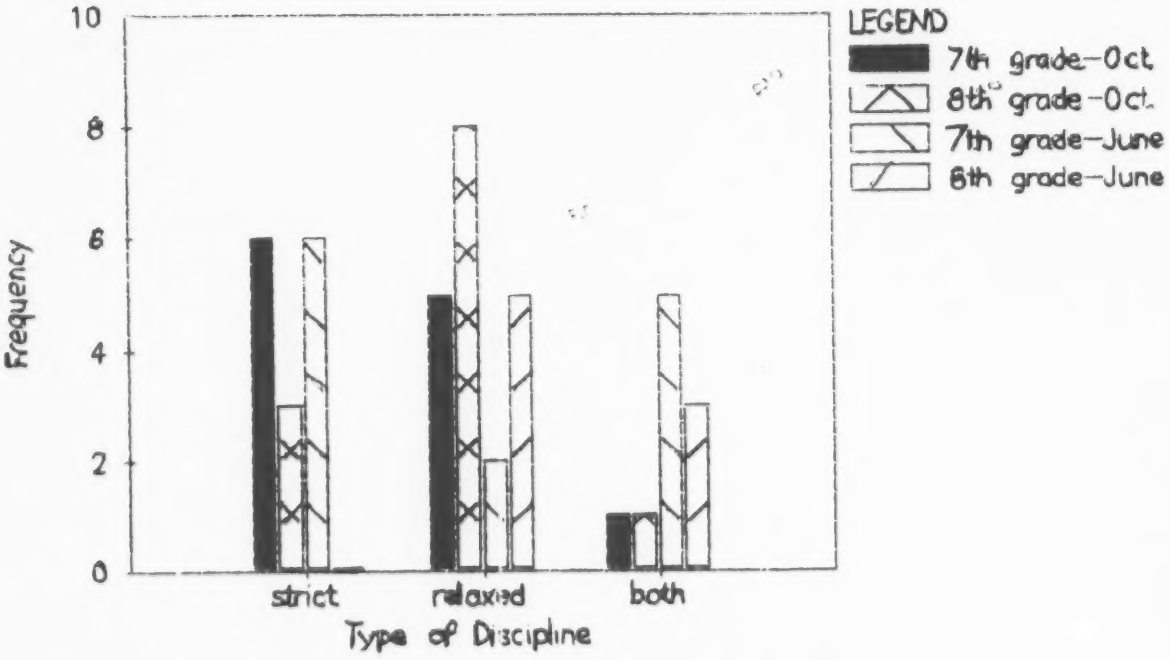

Figure 9 DISCIPLINE OF TEACHERS TOWARDS STUDENTS

Table 1

Activities From Which Students Learn Best

	October		June	
	Grade		Grade	
Items	7	8	7	8
Book reports	1	1	2	1
Discussions	6	9	12	5
Questions & answers	4	2	6	3
Special projects	3	2	3	2
Plays	2	3	4	1
Models	5	5	3	0
Filmstrips	1	5	6	3
Movies	3	8	8	5
Outlining chapters	2	4	2	1

However, several who are employed, work for 16 or more hours. Several students have been suspended in the past, and three were suspended this year for smoking on school grounds. Most of the pupils did not belong to any clubs, organizations, or engage in sports after school. The students did feel that teachers cared about them and praised them sometimes. However, most of the students did not receive that care and praise from their parents who infrequently checked their child's work. The data from these questions can be found in Figures 10-17.

The counseling sessions and the dropout prevention program were enjoyed by the majority of the students. They commented that the video program would help to keep students from dropping out of school,and that it was educational, interesting, resourceful, helpful, good, and enjoyable. The program showed them that dropping out of school did not provide them with what was expected but instead they lost friends, family support, and were hassled by employers. It was a successful addition to the class. The students looked forward to each new lesson.

The students were given the opportunity to evaluate the components of the program that were most helpful. The 7th grade group thought that classroom discipline, field trips, and contracts and rewards were the most helpful. They thought the tutoring was least helpful. Of greatest help to the 8th grade students were support of teachers and the

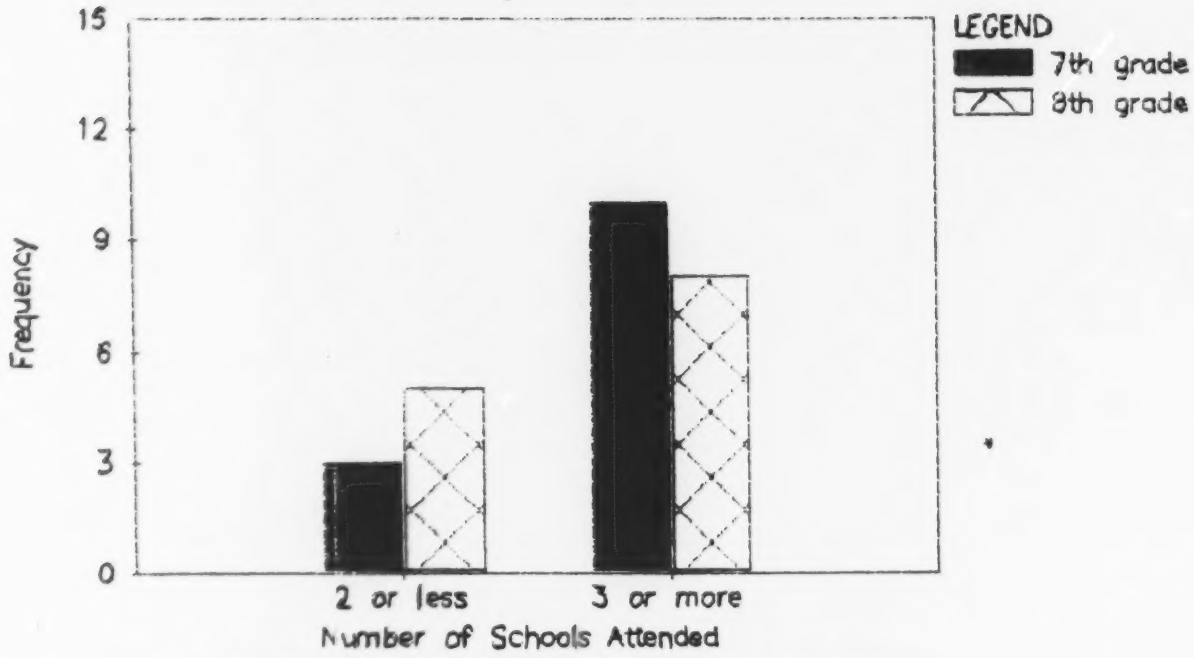

Figure 10 NUMBERS OF SCHOOLS ATTENDED BY STUDENTS

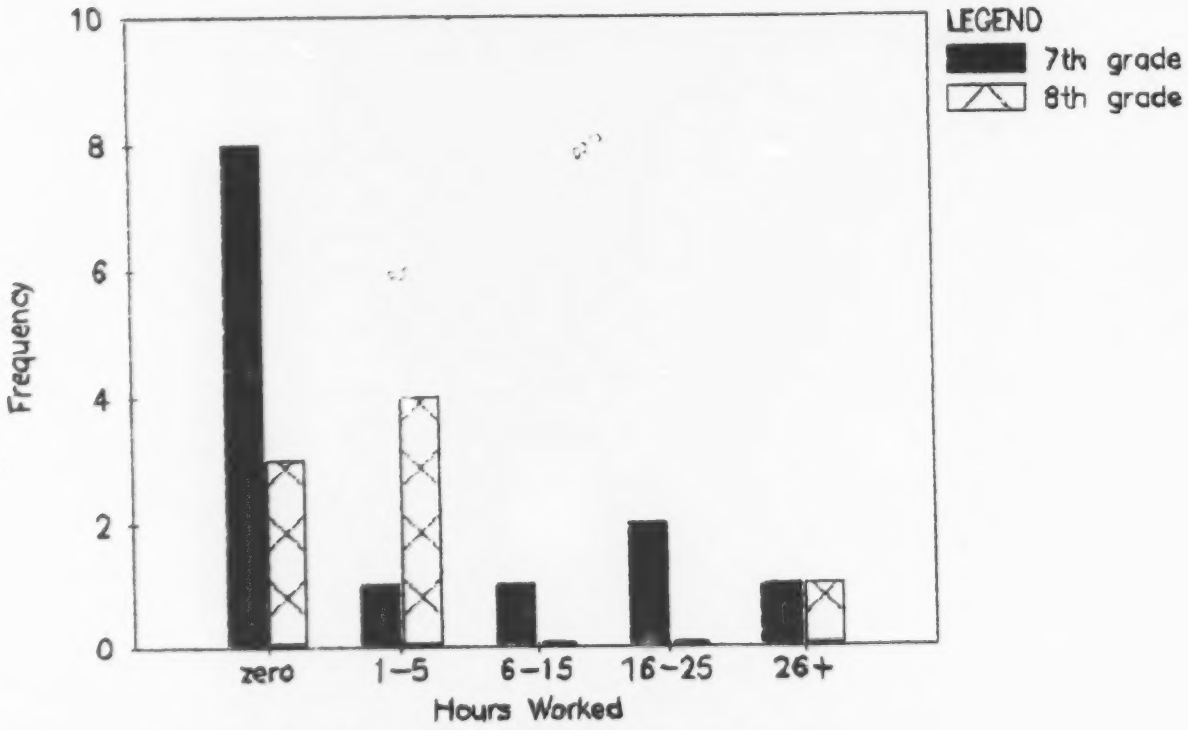

Figure 11 AMOUNT OF HOURS WORKED BY STUDENTS

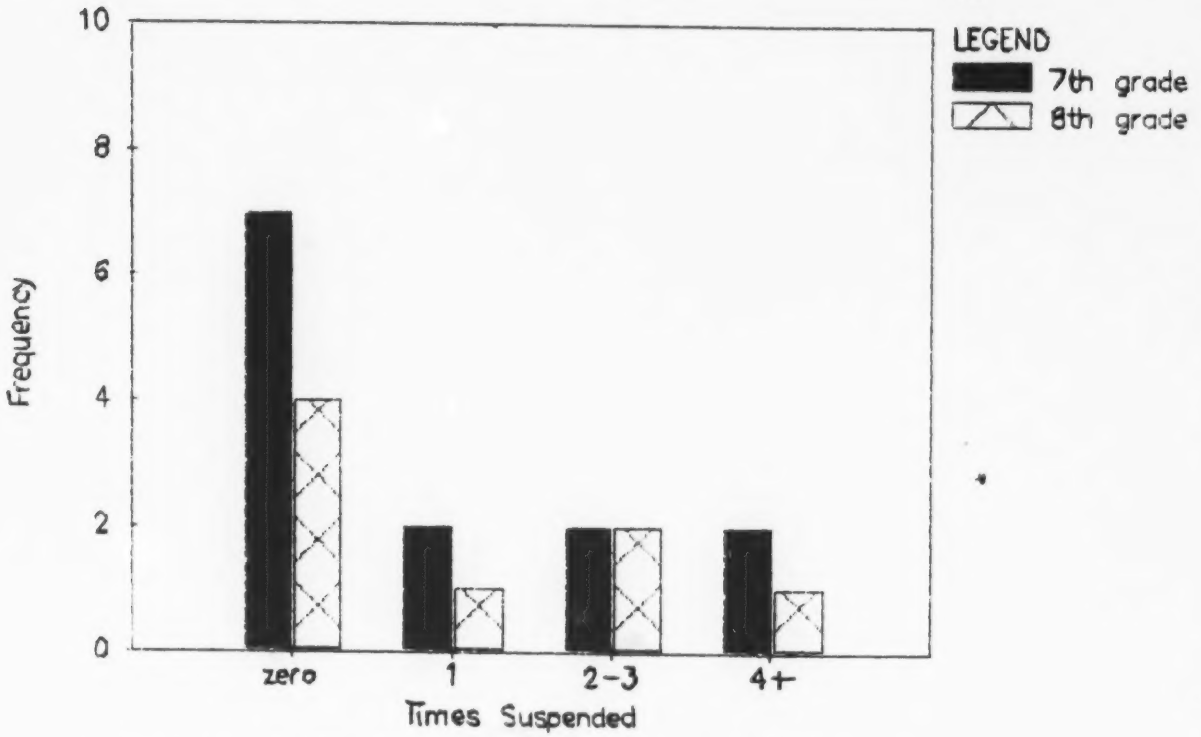

Figure 12 FREQUENCY OF STUDENT SUSPENSIONS

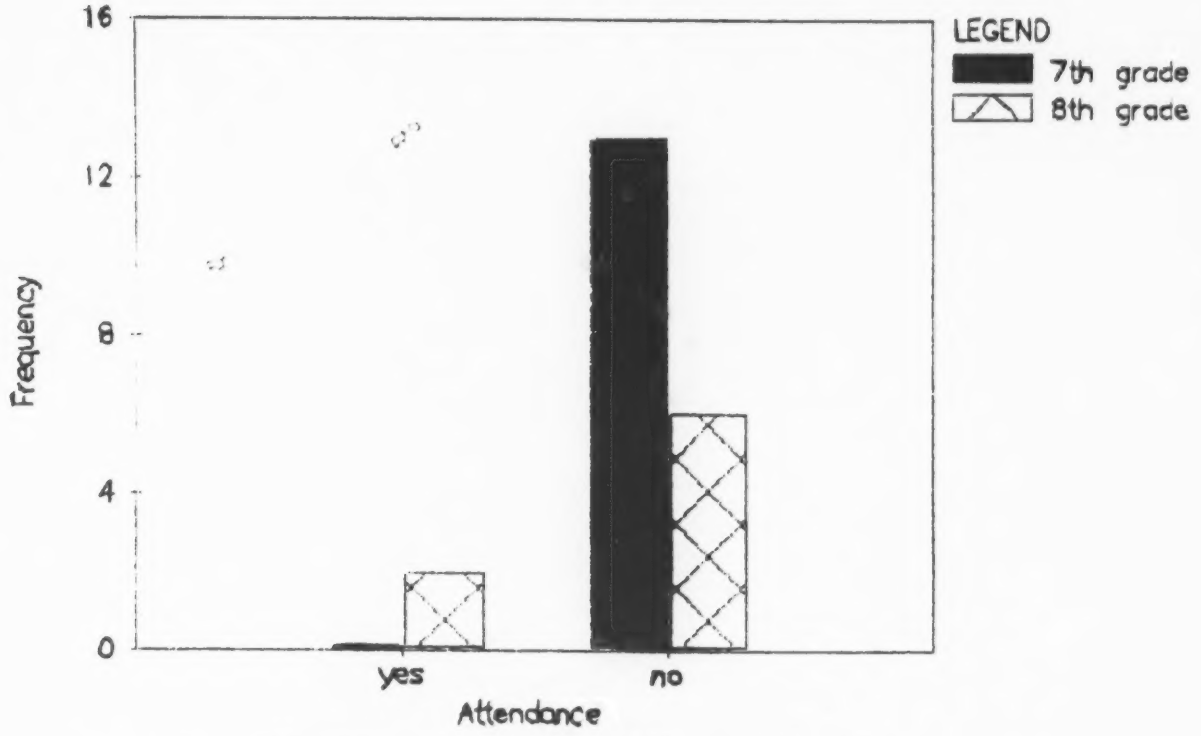

Figure 13 ATTENDANCE AT AFTERSCHOOL FUNCTIONS

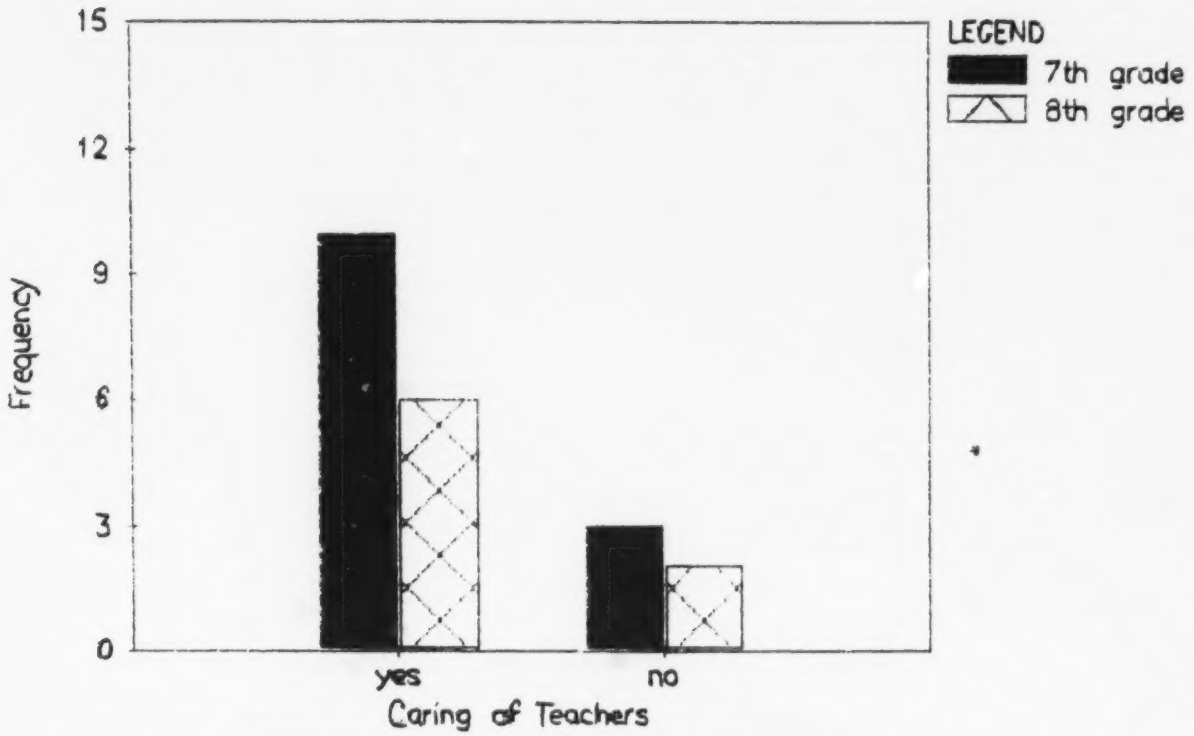

Figure 14 APPRAISAL OF CARING NATURE OF TEACHERS

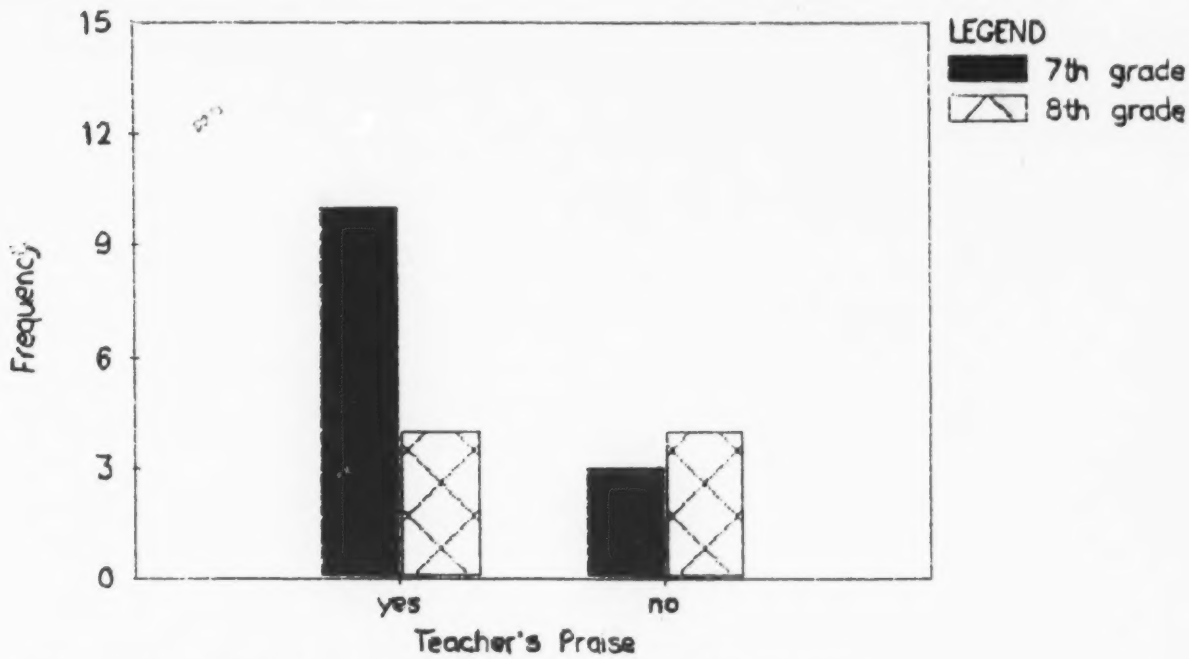

Figure 15 STUDENT'S AWARENESS OF TEACHER'S PRAISE

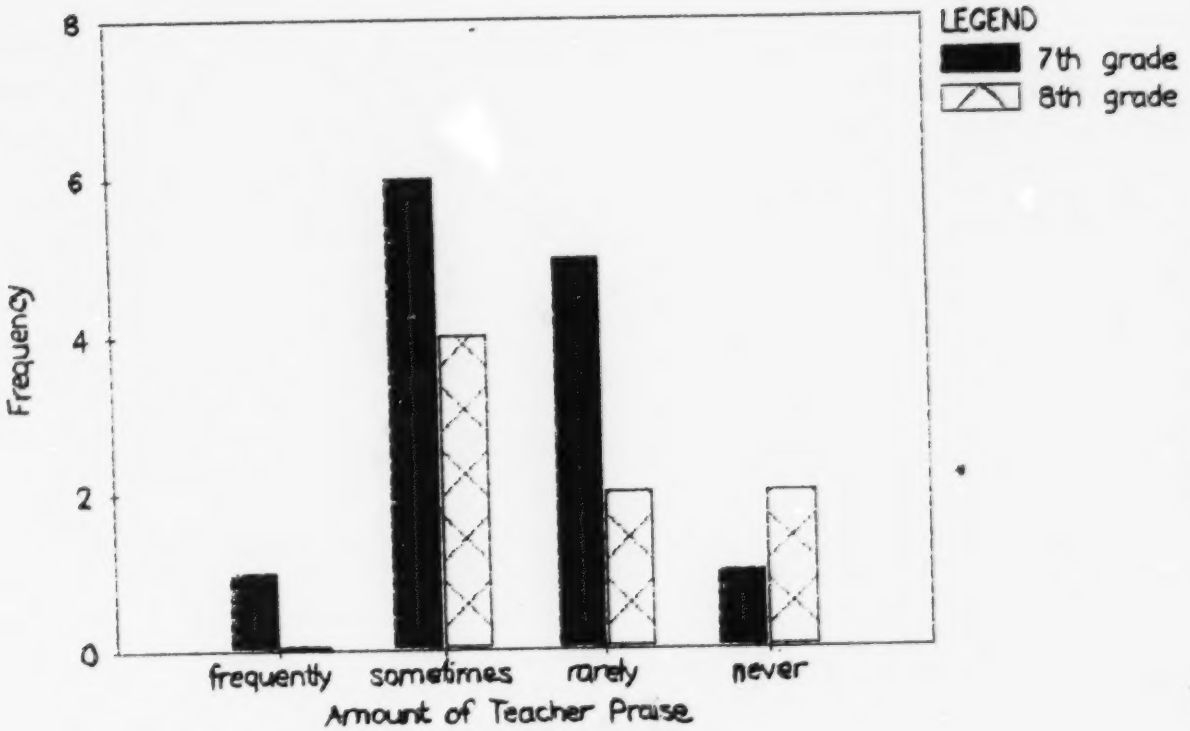

Figure 16 FREQUENCY OF TEACHER PRAISE

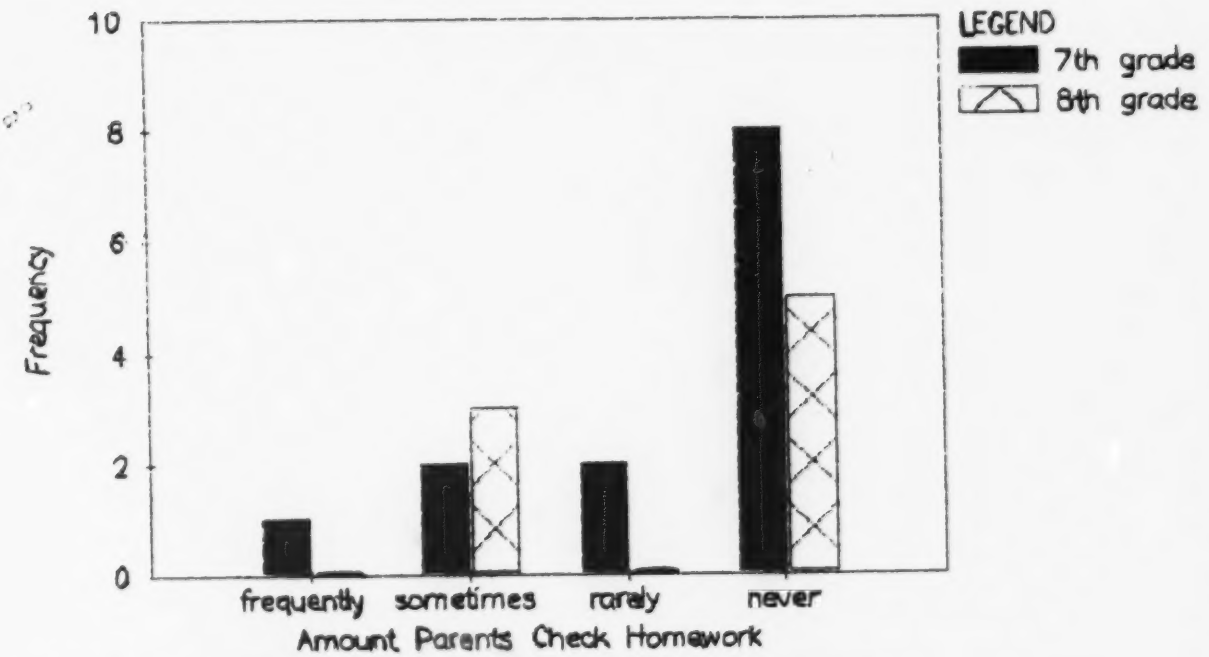

Figure 17 FREQUENCY OF PARENTS CHECKING HOMEWORK

contracts and rewards. They also did not think tutoring was very helpful. The exact choices are presented in Table 2.

Table 3 displays the summary of the productiveness of the year, helpfulness to others, and the need to remain in the program. Both grades, overwhelmingly, thought that this was a productive school year. They were glad to have been a part of the program, and felt that it would greatly benefit others. Most felt that dropping out was no longer a possibility. A surprising fact was that several students did not feel that they needed the alternative program next year, but were uncertain if they should be mainstreamed. There were also very honest students who admitted that they were not ready to be mainstreamed and wanted to be a part of the alternative classes next year.

When interviewed individually, the students reiterated some of the same comments. Many said that no changes or improvements were necessary. They stated that they wanted to feel more like the regular students in school. The students thought the program was a good influence on at-risk behaviors. They indicated an increase in motivation and self esteem. It was a fun year for many, and a few students gave thanks to the teachers for their hard work. One suggested that the teachers should be different each year. Having the same teacher for two or three years did

Table 2

Components Judged by Students as Most Helpful

Area	Grade 7	8
Structured classroom	5	1
Discipline	7	1
Support of teachers	5	4
Field trips	7	1
Tutoring	3	0
Counseling	4	1
Special attention	6	1
Contracts & rewards	7	4

Table 3

Student Evaluation of Alternative Program

	Grade					
Area	7			8		
	yes	no	maybe	yes	no	maybe
Positive year	9	3	1	5	2	0
Nonproductive if not in program	5	4	4	5	0	2
Dropping out still a possibility	1	10	2	2	5	0
Helpful to more students	12	0	1	6	1	0
Glad to be part of program	8	3	2	7	0	0
Need program next year	3	10	0	2	4	1
Mainstreamed next year	7	5	1	5	0	2

not allow them to experience different teaching styles.

The parents were asked for their evaluation of the program. Most of the parents who responded felt that the alternative program helped their child. They commented that their child gained confidence, showed capability to do work, provided extra effort to improve grades, improved self-concept, and was exposed to English at a slower pace that helped make the transition period in a new country easier. The positive outcomes included increased self-esteem, individual attention, better grades, increased interest in school, improved attendance, and less opportunity for skipping class.

The parents also found several negative outcomes of the alternative program. Most of them expressed concern because the other students called the alternative class the dumb group. The poor behavior of several students led to disruptive classes and stressful conditions for both the teacher and well-behaved students. Also they thought that having the same teachers for several years did not allow for complete growth of their child. Some recommended improvements were alternating teachers yearly, more communications between teachers and parents, more special projects, more advanced work, and increased discipline.

There was only one parent who expressed a total negative reaction to the program. She did not like the friends

her child had made and did not think that there was enough discipline in the classroom. She also complained that the teachers did not provide any individual help, and told the classes that they were inferior students. The writer questioned why the parent waited until the end of the year to express her disgust for the class. Why didn't the parent ever ask for a conference with the teachers? Why wasn't the student removed from the program if the parent thought it was not helping? These questions were not answered by the parent and remain an enigma to the writer.

The peer counselors, who worked with the alternative students in the self-esteem group, were asked for their evaluation of the program. Both groups of peer counselors thought that it was a productive year for the alternative students. There were positive behavioral changes, group cooperation, and a desire to attend the group. The alternative students became more aware of the feelings of others and became less insulting. Some negative outcomes were the resistance and superior attitude of two participants and the inability to behave properly in unstructured activities. The peer counselors felt that group work and cooperative learning were positive additions because it allowed the alternative students to develop an awareness of others. Some future improvements, recommended by the peer counselors, are to increase contact with the group, isolate disruptive students, and maintain structure.

The others who were asked to evaluate the program included the other 7th/8th grade alternative teacher, the 6th grade alternative teacher, the reading teachers, the gifted science teacher, and the administrator for the alternative students. All agreed that, in general, it had been a productive year. The students attended school with more regularity, were more motivated to learn, and were more confident. Some of the activities, such as field trips, game day, and field day, were enjoyed by the students. Another positive outcome was the fact that the teacher got to know each student personally and was able to help each student on a one-to-one basis. The students were motivated to do well so that they could be mainstreamed into regular classes.

The negative outcomes included the negative behavior of a few students influencing others and peer pressure from students in regular classes. This tended to lower motivation and self-esteem. The cooperative learning was considered to be a positive addition. It fostered a relationship with students of different ages and/or abilities. It helped to lessen preexisting stereotypes and promoted cooperation. It is both an academic and social learning experience. Some recommendations for improvements included more planning of cooperative projects, having one project each quarter, and more interaction with the students in regular classes. This

may help to eliminate feelings of isolation on the part of the alternative students.

The writer shared many of the same comments and recommendations of her colleagues. Overall, it was a productive year. Many of the students gained confidence, motivation, organization skills, better study habits, and self-esteem. A few students, who did not find this year to be productive, admitted that they failed to take advantage of the opportunities presented to them. The writer was able to elicit help from parents for only a few of the students. One of these students rebelled and refused to be helped; another changed his behavior and work habits for the better. Discipline within the classrooms could have been more consistent. The inconsistency may have contributed to periods of regression and nonlearning by several students. The teachers who were strict were not well liked by the students in contrast to the teachers who were more lenient in their classroom rules. The cooperative learning projects were successful, but several could have been better planned. Also more projects with students in regular classes should have been worked into the schedule.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the writer was very pleased with the results. Many of the students did show increases in motiva-

tion, confidence and self-esteem. They attended regularly, and were on time for class, even though many were late for school. Grades improved, as did achievement test scores. Most of the students felt positive about the year. The contracts and rewards were successful for many of the students. The cooperative learning and peer counseling group also proved to be helpful for the alternative students. The county provided dropout prevention program was very helpful in transmitting the problems of dropping out of school. The small classes allowed for individual attention and increased learning. Teachers, parents, and students agreed that it was a productive year for most of the students involved.

Recommendations

The writer's recommendations are as follows:

1. Small classes, 18 students maximum.

2. Have set discipline rules and consequences that all teachers involved follow.

3. Have both teachers of major subjects use contracts and rewards, not just one.

4. Increase contact with peer counselors, have more group sessions and individual sessions as well.

5. Increase parental involvement, perhaps by providing parent effectiveness training.

6. Increase the number of cooperative learning projects between different alternative grade levels as well as gifted and/or regular classes.

7. Plan a field day, movie day, and/or game day once a month contingent on fulfillment of contracts.

8. Maintain rapport with elective teachers and include them in conferences, special projects, contracts, and disciplinary rules.

9. Continue counseling sessions once a week. Update and use the county provided dropout prevention program as well.

10. Have the students be a part of all decisions involving contracts and rewards, disciplinary rules, field trips, cooperative learning projects, and counseling topics.

11. Involve the administrators in all phases of the program.

12. Provide a separate 6th, 7th, and 8th grade team of teachers so that the students can experience a variety of teachers and not have the same ones for two or three years.

Dissemination

At the time of the writing of this practicum, the writer had shared her results with her co-workers at school. She was also planning to disseminate her findings to her colleagues within the county. She has maintained contact

with the author of the county's dropout prevention program and has offered assistance when the program is updated. She was also planning to submit her findings to a new county newsletter for teachers of alternative education.

The alternative program will continue to be a part of the school's curriculum. Several of the writer's recommendations will be used in order to improve the program's effectiveness. The writer will continue to be involved with the alternative program and any changes instituted.

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APPENDIX A

Student Achievement Contract

Appendix A

Student Achievement Contract

The specific goals or terms of the contract are:

_____

_____

_____

The specific reward to be received when the contract is fulfilled is: _____

_____

_____

Starting date: _____

Ending date: _____

Student's signature: _____

Teacher's signature: _____

Parent's signature: _____

Contract fulfilled: yes _____ no _____ date _____

Reward received: yes _____ no _____ date _____

APPENDIX B

Student Questionnaire

Appendix B

Student Questionnaire

Answer the following questions with accuracy and honesty. Ask your teacher for help if you don't understand the question.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Age: _____ Grade: _____

1. Not counting Ramblewood Middle School, how many different schools have you attended? _____
2. Of all the teachers you have had since first grade, think about the one you liked best. Why did you like that teacher? _____

   _____

   _____
3. What kind of teacher do you learn best from?

   _____

   _____
4. What causes you to get upset with a teacher?

   _____

   _____

5. When a teacher makes a homework assignment, what do you think is the most important thing for him/her to do when making the assignment? _____

_____

_____

6. The subject I enjoy the most is _____ because _____

_____

7. The subject that I do not like is _____ because _____

_____

8. Check the item(s) that you honestly feel you learn the most from:

_____ book reports _____ plays _____ filmstrips

_____ discussions _____ models _____ movies

_____ questions & answers_____ outlining chapters

_____ special projects _____ other (specify) _____

9. My biggest problem in school is _____. If I am going to overcome this problem, I will have to

_____

_____

10. Have you ever thought about dropping out of school before high school graduation? _____ yes _____ no Why?

_____

_____

11. What do you think should happen to students who act out in class or break other school rules? _____

_____

_____

12. Should discipline in the classroom be strict or relaxed? _____ Why? _____

_____

_____

13. What messages would you like to give teachers and administrators about how to make school a terrific place?

_____

_____

14. After completing high school, what are your personal plans? _____

_____

15. What do you like to do in your spare time?

_____

_____

16. What rewards would you like to receive for doing well in school and achieving your goals? List as many as you like. _____

_____

_____

APPENDIX C

Student End of the Year Evaluation

Appendix C

Student End of the Year Evaluation

Answer the following questions with accuracy and honesty. Ask your teacher for help if you don't understand the question.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Check the areas of the program that helped you the most:

_____ structured classroom _____ tutoring

_____ discipline in classroom _____ counseling sessions

_____ support of teachers _____ special attention

_____ field trips _____ contracts and rewards

_____ other (specify) _____

2. Do you feel that this year was a positive and successful one? _____

_____

3. Do you feel that you may have had a nonproductive year if you were not in this special program? _____

_____

_____

4. If you ever considered dropping out of school is that still a possibility? _____

5. Do you think more middle school students could be helped by this program? _____

_____

6. Are you glad that you were a part of this program?

_____

_____

7. Do you feel that you need this program again next year?

_____

_____

8. Do you feel that you are ready to be mainstreamed into regular classes? _____

_____

9. How could this program be improved? _____

_____

_____

10. Please make any additional comments concerning this program. _____

_____

_____

APPENDIX D

Parental Letter

Appendix D

Parental Letter

September 27, 1989

Dear Parent,

Middle school can be a difficult time for some students. It is the transition stage between elementary and high school. It is also the time during which the student transforms from a child into an adolescent. The physical, mental, and social changes that your child is going through can cause difficulties to arise at home and at school.

The Alternative Department has developed a program to help your son or daughter get through this rough period of time. It is designed to meet the individual needs of the students involved. We hope to teach your son or daughter to set and achieve challenging and realistic goals, increase his or her motivation to learn, and strengthen your child's work in all school subjects. The program also will stress organization, responsibility, and self-reliance.

We will offer tutoring, counseling, support, and field trips along with the regular school curriculum. We will be utilizing contracts between teachers and students to help them achieve their goals. We also would like to encourage parent involvement, support, and assistance in our endeavor.

The Alternative Department is looking forward to a

great year. Please feel free to contact us with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Alternative Department Head

APPENDIX E

Amended Student Questionnaire

Appendix E

Amended Student Questionnaire

Answer the following questions with accuracy and honesty. Ask your teacher for help if you do not understand the question.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Age: _____ Grade: _____

1. Not counting Ramblewood Middle School, how many different schools have you attended? _____

2. Of all the teachers you have had since first grade, think about the one you liked best. Why did you like that teacher? _____

   _____

   _____

3. What kind of teacher do you learn best from?

   _____

   _____

   _____

4. What causes you to get upset with a teacher?

   _____

   _____

   _____

5. How many hours do you work outside of school for pay?

   (1) zero (2) 1-5 hours (3) 6-15 hours

   (4) 16-25 hours (5) 26 or more hours

6. How many times have you been suspended from school?

   (1) never (2) one time (3) 2-3 times

   (4) 4 or more times

7. Did you join any clubs or organizations or play sports on a team at school this year?

   yes _____ no _____

8. Do you think any of your teachers really care about you?

   yes _____ no _____

9. Did any of your teachers praise you for your work?

   yes _____ no _____

10. How often do teachers praise you for doing your homework, answering questions in class, or doing well on a test?

    frequently _____ sometimes _____

    rarely _____ never _____

11. How often do your parents check over your homework?

    frequently _____ sometimes _____

    rarely _____ never _____

12. The subject I enjoy the most is _____

    because _____

    _____

13. The subject that I do not like is _____

    because _____

14. Check the item(s) that you honestly fell you learn the most from:

_____ book reports _____ plays _____ filmstrips

_____ discussions _____ models _____ movies

_____ questions & answers _____ outlining chapters

_____ special projects ____ other (specify) _____

15. My biggest problem in school is _____.
If I am going to overcome this problem, I will have to

_____

_____

16. Have you ever thought about dropping out of school before high school graduation? yes _____ no _____
Why? _____

_____

17. What do you think should happen to students who act out in class or break other school rules? _____

_____

_____

18. Should discipline in the classroom be strict or relaxed?
_____ Why? _____

_____

19. What messages would you like to give teachers and administrators about how to make school a terrific place? _____

_____

20. After completing high school, what are your personal plans? _____

_____

_____

21. What do you like to do in your spare time?

_____

_____

_____

22. What rewards would you like to receive for doing well in school and achieving your goals? List as many as you like. _____

_____

_____

APPENDIX F

Teacher Evaluation

Appendix F

Teacher Evaluation

Please answer the following questions concerning the productiveness of this school year. Thank you very much for your help.

1. Do you feel this has been a productive year for the alternative department? Why or why not?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. List some positive outcomes of the alternative program.

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. List some negative outcomes of the alternative program.

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. Do you think cooperative learning, joining of two classes, is a positive addition to the alternative program? Why or why not?

_____

_____

_____

_____

5. How could the alternative program be improved?

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX G

Parent Evaluation

Appendix G

Parent Evaluation

Please answer the following questions concerning the productiveness of your child's school year. Thank you very much for your help.

1. Do you feel that the alternative program has helped your child this year? Please state why or why not.

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. List some positive outcomes of the alternative program.

_____

_____

_____

3. List some negative outcomes of the alternative program.

_____

_____

_____

4. How could the alternative program be improved?

_____

_____

_____